Peculiar Hysterical Charm

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Peculiar Hysterical Charm

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Summary

One found what they truly needed when they stopped obsessively thinking about finding it.

This is a story in which Will pursues Hannibal and gets him, wants a child and adopts one, builds a life and almost loses it.

Or, it's a story in which Hannibal allows himself to be wooed, becomes a family man to keep his "person suit" intact, and almost loses it all due to his hubris.

Notes

Kid fic kid fic kid fic!! We were so excited to get this request from a friend. We've wanted to write little Abigail for a while!

This is *technically* murder family, though not enough times passes for Abigail to grow up to be her canon age. But in this, Will is the one who is head over heels from the beginning and wants it all immediately. And Hannibal... is Hannibal XD

We promise there's a happy ending! It just gets a bit messy til Hannibal gets his head out of his own butt.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

One found what they truly needed when they stopped obsessively thinking about finding it.

And Will had found him.

He was tall, carrying himself like a prince, dressed in patterns that shouldn't be near each other on a design table let alone in the same outfit. A visitor's badge hung from his lapel, and he carried his coat folded over his arms as he waited in line for coffee, and he was radiant.

Will walked into the corner of a table in his distraction and spilled his own drink over himself with a loud yelp of surprise. When he looked up, the man was looking at him, head tilted to the side, curious and amused. Will's cheeks were on fire but he couldn't help but smile, shaking his head and flicking sticky coffee from his fingertips.

"Sorry," he muttered. No one else had seemed to notice his particular display of gracelessness, and the coffee was nothing more than dirty water at the FBI cafeteria anyway so it was hardly a loss.

"No apology necessary," the man replied. He had an accent. Will had to swallow down the sound he was about to make. He didn't know what other sound to make, though, to keep those eyes on him; there was no way to continue this conversation without being invasive, without delving into the horror of small talk that Will usually avoided like the plague.

"Getting coffee?" Will offered helpless, cringing at his own pathetic attempt. If the other felt any displeasure at being spoken to, it didn't show on his face. Instead, he inclined his head.

"That was the idea."

Will shook his head. "I wouldn't recommend it," he said. He grabbed a few napkins from the holder at the counter as he stepped nearer and patted himself down. "Didn't even leave a stain," he said, pulling his shirt taut out in front of him. "Nothing to it but the smell."

The man hummed, eyes down to the wetness on Will's clothes. Will was in dark flannel today, there was no way to see if the coffee stained or not. Neither seemed to care.

"Have you another place you can recommend I go?" the stranger asked instead.

Will wanted to lick his lips. "I have a few favorites," he said. "If you have the time."

The man gave a thoughtful hum, glancing down at his watch. He gave a regretful sigh that made Will's shoulders tense.

"I'm afraid I've a meeting to attend," he said. "A rain check, perhaps?"

It wasn't a no, though in Will's experience, it was a good way to politely brush someone off.

But then the man pulled a business card out of his pocket, his number prominently emblazoned on the front. “Doctor Hannibal Lecter,” he said, holding out his hand for Will to shake.

Will gripped his hand, surprisingly soft, with calloused fingertips. Just that small touch was enough to have his heartbeat pick up. This close, Will could smell cologne, sandalwood.

“Will Graham.”

Hannibal’s grip tightened minutely, and then he smiled. “I’m sure we’ll see each other again very soon.”

Will could only nod. What else could he say? He’d been rejected -- politely, but rejected nonetheless -- and in effect sent on his way, but his feet felt rooted to the ground. In the end he cleared his throat, gestured unnecessarily to his shirt, and forced himself to put one foot in front of the other until he was far enough away from the man -- Doctor Hannibal Lecter -- for the spell to break.

Or at least ease.

Will changed in his office, checked the clock, and sat behind his desk, foot bouncing, as he let his mind replay the scene all over again.

It had been less than two minutes altogether, from the moment he spilled his coffee to the moment he stepped away, but it had felt like time stood still. Will had never believed in that whole romantic nonsense, he’d never felt that tug to be with someone, anyone, as long as he wasn’t alone. This was novel, this was almost frightening. It *should* have been frightening. Will felt like he was losing his mind.

Will didn’t like people, people were too complex and wanted too much. But this man… Will wanted to unfold this man like an origami crane, peek inside and learn everything about him. Worse, Will wanted to let Hannibal Lecter do the same to him.

Will looked at the business card he’d been given and ran his fingers over the name and number on it. He touched it until the cardboard felt warm like skin and the flat of his fingers felt numb. Then he picked up a case file and deliberately set it on top, hiding the card away. He had reports to write. Jack hadn’t called him to the scene for the Hobbs case, but that didn’t mean that Will hadn’t been knee deep in the investigation from day one.

Minnesota Shrike, killer of young women, and eventual family annihilator. Death by cop. No remorse, no regrets, nothing left behind.

Almost nothing.

She was dark haired, blue eyed. There was a bandage over her throat, over a mark that would scar.

Abigail Hobbs stared up at Will from her hospital bed, eyes red from crying. The photo made her look even smaller, tiny frame dwarfed by the huge bed, rails drawn up to keep her from

rolling out.

Will had photos from before she woke up, when she'd been kept under to let the wound heal a little. But it was this one he kept coming back to.

She was only two years old. Two years old, and the center of her father's world, so much so that he began to wind up tighter and tighter as she learned to explore the world, as she went to daycare and made friends, and became more and more independent. He hadn't wanted to share her with anyone, but he hadn't wanted to hurt her, either.

Not even when he did.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs had killed entire families to keep himself from killing and keeping his own. He'd consumed young girls so he could keep a part of them with him, always, in the way he couldn't keep his own daughter.

But in the end, when he'd been caught, he'd tried to take her with him.

Will looked at the photo again. Red-eyed from tears, but stony-faced. He'd never seen a toddler look so closed-off.

His phone beeped. Jack.

Meeting, my office.

Will hummed, eyes on the little girl in the photograph for a moment longer before he closed the file.

Will had never sought a partner for life, but he'd long wanted children. Not biological ones, he had enough going on in his head that he knew that particular burden wasn't one he needed to share, but someone to care for, to guide and watch them grow.

Little Abigail's eyes were burned into the back of his mind as he made his way down the corridor towards Jack's office. He knocked arbitrarily before pushing the door open with his shoulder, and shoved his glasses up his nose to just the right spot so that he wouldn't have to meet Jack's eyes.

Jack's office wasn't much different from Will's own, only it was a little larger to accommodate for the inevitable meetings endlessly held there. One wall was covered in cork boards, filled with pictures of FBI's top ten most wanted, newspaper articles, business cards, christmas cards from friends, wonky children's drawings from nephews and nieces he never talked about. Beneath those was a water cooler, a shaky table that held a coffee machine and a couple of chipped mugs.

Jack's coffee was at least stronger than the shit in the cafeteria.

Jack's desk held court in the middle of the room, more boards behind it with active cases, boxes of files, a coat stand with spare changes of clothes. The desk itself was littered with all manner of office debris. Jack had his hands folded over the worn wood, and freed one to gesture for Will to sit down.

It was only then that Will noticed another person was in the office as well.

Elegant posture, garish patterns, sandalwood.

He didn't even hear what Jack was saying until he uninterrupted him. "Dr. Lecter."

Jack blinked. "You've met?"

Will shook his head, shrugged, nodded. "We've been through the wars."

"Mr. Graham advised me against the cafeteria coffee earlier today," Hannibal added, a small smile curling his lips. Jack grunted.

"Wise," he agreed. "Well, good, makes my life easier then. Will, Dr. Lecter is a psychiatrist, and a friend of the FBI. He's helped the bureau before, and the BAU in particular. I've called him in for help with the Hobbs case."

"We've solved it," Will reminded him, eyes still on Hannibal, hands trembling incrementally in his lap.

"Yes," Jack drew the word out, "but certain cases take an emotional toll on those working it. I've asked Doctor Lecter here not as a consultant but as a doctor."

Will stiffened. He felt almost betrayed, although Hannibal had made him no promises and could not have predicted how intensely interested Will had become after only one meeting.

In a way, it was good that Hannibal was a psychiatrist. He would be intelligent, able to follow topics Will suggested. He would understand Will's work, and the way it impacted him.

It didn't make Will any happier about being forcibly mandated into therapy.

"We need only meet the once," Hannibal said, "unless you request more." There was a knowing quirk to his smile, one that rekindled the warmth in Will's belly. Will turned his ire on Jack, the one truly deserving of it.

"Once," he said slowly, "and if you make a habit of springing psychiatrists on me, I'll quit."

"You won't," Jack said knowingly. He was right, the bastard, but Will refused to give him that confirmation.

This could be good. More time with Hannibal, alone in a room together. Time to get to know him, to let infatuation fan itself into a fervor.

"Once," Will repeated, but this time he looked at Hannibal, brow raised. "I'd hate to waste your valuable time on unnecessary psychoanalysis."

"I assure you, our time together will not be a waste," Hannibal replied. Will could have immolated on the spot.

Jack took a few moments to arrange an appointment, ticking his own boxes for the higher ups, before letting Will go again. Hannibal, to Will's displeasure, did not get up to leave with him. He'd be meeting everyone on the investigative team, apparently, poor man.

Regardless, Will had an appointment for Thursday next, seven o'clock, at Hannibal's office in Baltimore.

The week passed in a blur, the appointment sitting at the back of Will's mind like a light at the end of a godawful tunnel. He wrote his reports, he gave his lectures, and he started the arduous process of filing for adoption. Will had decided long ago that this was the year he'd finally become a father; he'd worked towards it, interviewed with all the appropriate legal bodies, submitted his earnings, allowed countless police checks. He'd even had Jack vouch for him as an employer and the head of the BAU as to his capability.

But it was a hard road for everyone, for anyone. And Will was a single male with no other family to speak of but a retired father far off in Biloxi.

Some agencies didn't allow single parent adoptions to begin with. Others were technically not discriminatory, but in *practice* were likely to pass him over in favor of fuller, more traditional families.

Blue eyes haunted Will's dreams.

It would be a long road. Perhaps months, maybe well over a year. Will felt impatient from the moment he signed his name to the very first sheet.

It was difficult to put it out of his mind, but his meeting with Hannibal held just as much of Will's attention. Will had looked him up. No children, no spouse. An occasional date to the opera, immortalized in the society pages, but when asked he'd always denied romantic entanglements.

It was possible he wasn't gay, but unlikely. Will knew how to read people; he could tell when he'd drawn someone's interest. Doctor Lecter was definitely interested.

Will dressed carefully when the day came. He could not, and *would not* wear a suit and tie as Doctor Lecter always seemed to, but he ironed his shirt carefully and slicked his hair back until it almost resembled a style.

He rarely brushed off his dogs' fur from his pants when he went to work, this was making an effort.

And he arrived on time. He was in the lobby of Hannibal's office -- no secretary, he noticed -- seven on the dot, and smiled when the doctor opened the door himself to welcome Will inside.

"It's good to see you again, Mr. Graham."

“Will,” Will told him, hanging his coat up on the coat rack as soon as he entered the office. The place looked like something out of a fantasy novel; it had a goddamn mezzanine filled with books, with ladders leading up to it, and more on that floor itself, allowing people to climb to the highest shelves. One wall was just windows, floor to ceiling, with drapes that still somehow managed to pool effortlessly on the floor.

A wide desk. A chaise lounge. Statues and sketches and framed certifications. Two chairs with side tables with far too much space between them.

Will sat down in one and crossed one leg over the other, waiting for Hannibal to join him.

“How has the week been for you, Will?” Hannibal asked him, working open the second button of his suit before taking a seat across from him.

“I’ve been excited for our meeting.”

“I got the impression that psychoanalysis was not your cup of tea,” Hannibal pointed out, amused. Will snorted.

“Isn’t,” he confirmed. “But I think you are.”

Hannibal tilted his head to the side, eyes searching Will’s face before he blinked languidly at him.

“Your interest is flattering.”

“And not unwelcome,” Will said, asked almost.

Hannibal’s expression warmed. He cleared his throat softly. “No,” he agreed, “not unwelcome. However, it is surprising.”

“You’re an attractive man,” Will said. “Intelligent. Driven. Not many pursue more than one specialty in the medical field.”

“You’ve done your research.”

Will smiled, eyes narrowed. “And you haven’t? You said my interest in you was surprising. That implies you had reason to think I wouldn’t be.”

Hannibal tilted his head in acknowledgement. “I would, perhaps, have prepared for your visit, had Agent Crawford not made such efforts unnecessary.”

Will winced. Jack liked him, most days, but he didn’t mince words, and he didn’t often see Will at his best. Generally, he saw Will when he was overtired and irritated, carrying killers in his head. “What did he tell you?”

Hannibal’s shoulder lifted incrementally in a shrug. “What a concerned boss would say about an overworked employee he worries for.”

Will snorted, shaking his head. “He told you I was a headcase, didn’t he.”

“He suggested that you have a tendency to get very deep into your work,” Hannibal replied, “and sometimes have a hard time finding your way out again, and back to yourself.”

Will shrugged this time. He was sure Jack hadn’t been so cavalier about it, but in essence he hadn’t said anything untrue.

“My work takes me to places others would rather not go,” he allowed. “I become very unsavory things for the greater good.”

“Like a sin eater.”

Will laughed, nodding. “I suppose so, yes. Though I’ve thankfully avoided getting a taste for it, even all these years later.”

“But it lingers sometimes, no?” Hannibal asked, leaning forward a little, setting both feet flat to the floor and clasping his hands between his knees. “The taste of them? The vestigial echo of hatred, the sour tang of dissatisfaction.”

Will swallowed, licking his lips. He uncrossed his legs to mirror Hannibal’s position. “Sometimes.” he admitted.

“How do you return to yourself?”

“I have my dogs,” Will replied. “I have my hobbies.”

“No family?”

“Not yet,” Will smiled. “And you, doctor? How do you unwind after taking on the pedantic problems of others?” Will tucked his bottom lip between his teeth a moment. “We’re quite alike, you and I, aren’t we?”

“Similarities run through us,” Hannibal agreed. “I’m afraid I’m the last of my line, and no dogs to speak of. But hobbies, I have in abundance.”

“The opera,” Will suggested. “Art.” He’d seen sketches on the desk when he’d come in. Just a corner, peeking out from under a book, but Will made his living on observation.

“The arrangement of small things to create a greater thing of beauty,” Hannibal said. “I enjoy arts of all kinds. Sketching, painting. Music. I find cooking to be the most soothing of my pastimes, though.”

A man of many talents. Hannibal would make a good father; Will could already imagine him guiding little hands through careful practices. “I’m afraid I don’t get many chances to cook,” Will admitted. “I cook for the dogs at the beginning of the week, for myself even less. I do play the piano, though.”

Played. The one that sat in Will’s living room had gone too long without love; if it was still in tune, Will would be shocked.

If Hannibal asked Will to demonstrate his skills, Will wasn't sure he'd be able to find the keys.

That could be fixed, though. He'd simply ask for guidance.

"I learned myself," Hannibal said, smiling, "but I find I prefer the harpsichord."

Will couldn't help it, he laughed, immediately holding out a hand and shaking his head before Hannibal could take offense. "I'm sorry, I just… that really fits you for some reason. An archaic instrument properly appreciated."

"It's hardly the strangest," Hannibal added, amused, "I play the theremin as well."

"Fuck," Will laughed again, snaring a hand in his hair and grinning up at Hannibal from beneath his fringe. He wanted to know him better. He needed to. Taking a breath, Will allowed it to burn his lungs before he released it. "Come to dinner with me."

Hannibal blinked, turned his eyes to the clock on the wall before returning them to Will once more.

"I'm afraid I have to decline," he said, raising two fingers gently when Will looked shattered. "It would be unethical of me to get involved with my patients."

"I'm hardly--"

"For the next thirty-eight minutes," Hannibal replied, amusement dancing behind his eyes. "you are."

Will's smile returned, so wide it hurt. "And then?"

"And then we shall see," Hannibal said, sitting back in his chair once more. "Perhaps you'll ask me to dinner, or perhaps I'll offer to cook for the two of us instead."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> *"How did it feel for you?" Will asked. Beneath his cheek, Hannibal's pulse didn't quicken, didn't slow, it remained steady and regular, thud-thud-thudding into Will's brain like a metronome.*
>
> *"Like the beginning of something," Hannibal told him.*

Will decided not to continue his therapy with Dr. Lecter.

Instead, he joined him at his home for dinner the next evening.

The second date, Will cooked for them.

The third date, Will shamelessly kissed Hannibal first, grinning when the man's fingertips set beneath Will's chin as though to hold him still. As though Will wanted to ever pull away from this. From him.

They'd made out like teenagers on Will's couch until Buster got stuck between the door and the screen door and Will was forced to pull away to rescue the wayward little cockblock. After that Hannibal had to -- regrettably -- be on his way. Considering he spent a full five more minutes saying goodbye to Will without saying anything at all, Will was confident Buster hadn't messed up his chances too badly.

The fourth date, Hannibal hosted at his home again and Will arrived early with a bottle of whiskey that he proudly presented.

"I know absolutely nothing about wine," he admitted, smiling. Hannibal's answering smile made Will want to grin, giddy.

"And I know little about whiskey. Perhaps we can educate each other."

Hannibal took the bottle from him, and tugged Will into the house before he could let go. Their lips met without fuss or fumbling, as though they were meant to fit together always, as though they already had, for an age.

Will's hand came up to press to Hannibal's cheek, and when they broke apart he was blushing.

"I've been thinking about your mouth since I saw you last," he admitted, a laugh puffing soundlessly out against Hannibal's lips. "God, that's embarrassing, isn't it? I shouldn't have told you that."

Hannibal's smile was sharp, knowing. Of course it was; Will had seen cunning and intelligence in his eyes the moment they met, calling to Will like a siren.

"You should tell me whatever crosses your mind to tell me," Hannibal said. "Especially the things that make you blush like this." The backs of his knuckles grazed Will's cheek, a gentle caress that sent a shiver down Will's spine.

"I've also been thinking about your hands," Will breathed. Hannibal's hand found his waist, broad, warm through the fabric of his shirt.

"You'll have to let me know if I live up to expectation," Hannibal whispered. He pulled Will closer, until they were flush against each other, until Will could feel another heartbeat against his own.

Then he cupped Will's jaw and tilted his head up, kissing him so hungrily that Will nearly stumbled from the force of it. He clung to Hannibal's arms, as those warm hands found the edges of his shirt and began to tug.

"Tell me if you want me to stop," Hannibal murmured against Will's lips.

Will groaned, grabbing a fistful of Hannibal's hair and dragging him back into the kiss.

He absolutely did not want this to stop. He wanted Hannibal's hands everywhere. He wanted his own hands to memorize every dip and curve of the man's body. Ha laughed when Hannibal turned aside just long enough to close the door and set the bottle of whiskey down before returning to devouring Will.

Will allowed his shirt to be tugged free, moaned when Hannibal's hands drew large and warm over his bare skin. Will was a very responsive lover, it wasn't his fault that so few people had ever brought such sounds out of him. That was on them, not on him. Hannibal played him like an instrument.

Will's own hands weren't idle either. He got fantastic pleasure from messing up Hannibal's immaculate hair style, from scrunching up the front of his pressed suit. With a shove, Will got Hannibal to divest himself of the jacket, groaning when he let it fall to the floor rather than making any attempt to hang it up. He was as starved for Will as Will was for him.

Hannibal's hands framed Will's face, cupped his throat, slid down his arms. Just that much larger than Will's own for him to feel safe, secure, *wanted.* Will yanked Hannibal's tie loose but didn't remove it, instead winding it around his hand until Hannibal pulled away and lifted his eyes to Will's with a smile.

"Will you lead me?" He asked. Will grinned, leaning back just enough to encourage Hannibal to step closer, tugged along by his makeshift leash.

"Will you follow?"

"Anywhere you'd like to take me."

Where Will took him was the staircase, pausing on the landing to allow Hannibal to lick and bite at the arch of his throat. Then down the hall, until Hannibal stopped them at an open door, letting Will tug him inside.

Hannibal's bedroom was opulent. Impeccably decorated, with huge, sturdy furniture in a wood so dark it was nearly black.

Will saw none of it, too busy ridding Hannibal of his shirt and tie.

"This is probably too fast," Will admitted, when Hannibal had his chest bare as well.

"Tell me if you want me to stop," Hannibal said again, nudging Will back until the backs of his knees met the edge of the bed.

Will didn't. He let Hannibal lay him out on silk sheets, nestled among a frightening array of pillows. Hannibal tugged Will's belt free, and then the button of his slacks, pulling the zipper down inch by inch to reveal bare skin.

"Brazen," Hannibal murmured, tugging at Will's slacks until he'd exposed him entirely, his cock thickening beneath Hannibal's gaze.

"Hopeful," Will countered, grinning when Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "Presumptuous," he amended. He pulled Hannibal close to kiss, moaning into his mouth when Hannibal wrapped a hand around Will's cock and stroked him.

"Fuck, Hannibal, your hands," he managed, before tugging Hannibal's bottom lip between his teeth and reaching to work Hannibal's pants open too. He flipped them, straddling Hannibal as the other stretched lazily back and watched Will take in the picture before him. Strong but not sculpted, scarred skin, greying hair over his chest and in a tempting line down from his navel. Down, down…

Will tugged Hannibal's trousers and the other lifted his hips to allow Will to fully bare him. Will kicked the rest of his own clothes off and moved to lay himself over Hannibal, groaning at how good it felt to press skin to skin with him.

Hannibal's hands were gentle, but they were everywhere. Down Will's back, over his ass, *squeezing* his ass, teasing along the crack…

"Not yet," Will begged him, laughing when Hannibal teased again, a little more insistently now. "Nooo, let me taste you first."

"Greedy."

"I'm equal opportunity," Will replied, kissing Hannibal chastely before rearranging himself so they were top to tail, Will's cock hanging teasingly above Hannibal's mouth as Will took the tip of Hannibal's into his own, sucking eagerly against the head.

Though it had been a long while since he'd had any practice, Will knew he was good at this. He knew how to draw sighs and moans from his partner with just his tongue, how to suck and swallow until his throat was constricting around the head.

He very nearly lost his balance, though, at the first teasing lick to the head of his own cock.

“Move as you like,” Hannibal told him, lips brushing the sensitive flesh of Will’s straining erection.

Will let his hips shift just a little, just enough to chase the warm heat of Hannibal’s mouth without choking him. For a moment, they moved just like that, Hannibal’s own hips arching up to chase Will every time he pulled back.

Finally, when Will thought he would have to stop soon or end the whole thing too early, Hannibal pulled back.

“I said to move as you like,” he told Will, thumb brushing the sensitive space just behind Will’s balls. “Perhaps I haven’t given enough encouragement.

Then, he parted Will’s cheeks with his thumbs, intentions clear. Will whimpered around Hannibal’s cock, back arching involuntarily at the first lick to his exposed entrance.

Hannibal was as hungry for Will here as he had been kissing him downstairs. *Devouring* was honestly the only word Will could come up with for how Hannibal’s mouth felt against him. His own rhythm slowed a little, unable to concentrate when his body was being driven to such pleasure so quickly.

Will pulled back with a helpless moan, his voice carrying as he trembled and laughed, pressing a sloppy kiss to the side of Hannibal’s cock.

“I’m going to come,” he warned him, trembling as Hannibal spread him wider, tongue spearing into him. “God, *Hannibal,”*

Hannibal hardly seemed to mind that Will was so quickly made undone, he hummed and held Will still as he tried to squirm away, relishing the sounds he pulled from him.

Will came moments later, arching his back, curving his shoulders forward and digging his fingers into the sheets as he made a mess of Hannibal’s chest and stomach. Hannibal’s cock twitched against Will’s lips, a pearlescent bead slipping free, and Will dove in to suck him again, as desperate to drive Hannibal mad as he’d been driven.

Hannibal continued his torment -- even as Will whimpered and whined against him, even as he trembled and tensed, over-sensitive and filthy in his pleasure -- until Will made him come and swallowed down everything with eager little sucks.

Both breathless, Hannibal allowed Will to collapse half against him and half on the bed, reaching out to grasp his ankle and kiss reverently over the curve of the bone there.

“ *Definitely* too fast,” Will panted, a smile tugging at his lips. “I wanted to take my time with you.”

Hannibal’s fingers found the ticklish arch of Will’s foot, then his ankle again, wrapping firmly around it.

“There’s always tomorrow,” he said.

‘Tomorrow’ turned out to be too busy, but the day after, they tumbled into bed again, just as eager, over just as quickly, hands grasping and tugging until they spilled against each other. Hannibal and Will both had full schedules, but they found time for each other at every opportunity. Not every night was reserved for sex, but those that were burned hot and fast, neither able to hold themselves back.

It was Will who finally settled the matter, cornering Hannibal in the hall when he first entered Hannibal’s home.

“We always get distracted,” he murmured, guiding Hannibal’s hand to his back, and then down, down, until Hannibal could slip beneath Will’s jeans and feel him, already slick. “I thought I’d make things easier on us.”

Hannibal murmured something in a language Will didn’t know, but the meaning was clear enough. He freed himself from Hannibal’s loose grip before he could tug Will closer and moved towards the stairs, laughing when Hannibal’s eyes narrowed, when his stance adjusted, preparing to chase him.

So a chase he gave, making it up the stairs and just past Hannibal’s room before strong arms wrapped around his middle and carried him to the bed, tossing Will down like a ragdoll. They barely managed to get their pants down far enough, the rest of their clothes forgotten, before Hannibal was pushing against Will’s slick rim.

Will bit down on the sheets and took everything; the slow pressure, the feeling of being so, so full, the heat of Hannibal’s breath as he whispered dirty things against the back of Will’s neck. A hand moved to cover his own where he clutched the blankets and Will turned his hand to press palm to palm with Hannibal instead. It wasn’t comfortable, but it hardly needed to be. When Hannibal moved, he *fucked* Will. it was claiming, primal, animalistic. Hannibal tugged aside Will’s shirt and bit against his shoulder, sucking a bruise there, he nuzzled the tiny curls at the base of Will’s neck before biting there too.

For his part, Will moaned like he was getting paid for it. It was brutal and perfect, and his cock rubbed slick and messy against the otherwise immaculate sheets as Hannibal fucked him.

“You undo me,” Hannibal groaned against him, tugging Will’s earlobe between his teeth. “You drive me mad with distraction.”

“Good,” Will laughed, bearing down as Hannibal slid into him again, pulling a low moan from both of them. He would ache the next day. He would feel Hannibal deep in him as he sat at his desk, as he moved around in front of his class, presenting a lecture. He would wear Hannibal’s bites and his marks beneath his clothes like personal trophies.

“So close,” he whined, trying to raise his knee a bit to open himself up further, but his jeans held him captive. “Please, Hannibal, I’m--”

Hannibal's pleased groan rumbled through his chest, Will felt it all the way down his spine. Hannibal forced him back down, rutting into him until there was nowhere for Will to go, nothing to do but hold on as wave upon wave of sensation pitched him closer to the edge.

It was Hannibal's bites that did it, his teeth sharp against Will's skin, not quite breaking through. Will offered up his throat and Hannibal fell upon him as though starving, sucking harsh bruises to Will's skin.

"I need, I-" Will gasped, body jerking beneath Hannibal's as he teetered and then fell over the precipice, spilling over against the sheets. Hannibal fucked him through it, Will's body sliding against bedding slick with sweat and his own release. His cock, oversensitive and softening, ground against the bed in ways that had Will sobbing.

Will's voice was hoarse from his high cries when Hannibal finally spilled inside him, but he was almost regretful to see it end. He felt like he needed more, like he would never be complete again without Hannibal inside him.

Hannibal nuzzled over the marks he'd left, trailing his lips softly along reddened bites as if in apology. When he pulled out, Will let out a little sob at the loss.

Hannibal kissed against Will's shoulders, down his spine. He carefully worked Will's pants free and tugged them away, he reached beneath Will as he lay panting on the bed to unbutton his shirt, kissing the bare skin it revealed. Will allowed himself to be bared, allowed himself to be the vulnerable one, sore and sated in Hannibal's bed. When he looked over his shoulder, Hannibal was undressing himself as well.

Without a word, Hannibal climbed into bed next to Will, pulling him close. Neither were beneath the covers, they lay oddly angled on the bed, and didn't care. Will nuzzled up beneath Hannibal's chin and spread a hand through the hair on his chest with a sigh.

"Was I too rough with you?" Hannibal murmured, nosing at Will's sweat-damp curls. Will snorted softly, the sound muffled by Hannibal's own skin.

"I like rough," he admitted quietly. "I like to be reminded I'm alive, that things can hurt, but that they can come together again, all at once."

He winced gently as he draped a leg over Hannibal and pressed closer to him, snaking an arm around his shoulders next.

"How did it feel for you?" Will asked. Beneath his cheek, Hannibal's pulse didn't quicken, didn't slow, it remained steady and regular, thud-thud-thudding into Will's brain like a metronome.

"Like the beginning of something," Hannibal told him, entirely unironically. "An exploration, one beast pushing another into action." He kissed Will's temple, kissed a little lower, to the corner of his eye. "You are extraordinary," he whispered.

Will grinned, flattered and aroused and exhausted. He squeezed himself up against Hannibal with a happy hum.

“Next time I’ll leave marks too,” he promised, eyes closing in pleasure, in surrender. Hannibal stroked his hair, tugging just enough to raise Will’s eyes to him, half-open and pupil-dark.

“I’ll wear them as proudly as you’ll wear mine,” Hannibal replied. Will didn’t know what to say, didn’t know how to voice the gratitude, the pleasure, the surprise, the *power* of it all. So he kissed Hannibal instead.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> *She was only two, and she'd been through a lot. Will was unsurprised to learn she had little use for those around her. Trust would come eventually, affection even slower.*
>
> *Will had a fisherman's patience. He didn't mind.*
>
> Will gets to meet Abigail!

Dating Hannibal turned out to be just as pleasurable as Will had imagined it would be. Beyond the fancy dinners and fantastic sex, Hannibal was a man of humor and taste. He was flamboyant in dress but very simple in his desires. He communicated. He let Will's dogs sit on his lap when he came over, and gave them due attention.

He was perfect.

They spent so many nights just in bed together, reading their own books or tablets, not a word between them. No silence was ever awkward. Will found that he missed the man desperately when they weren't together, and judging by the messages that were quickly returned or calls that took their place, he wasn't alone.

Will was smitten.

And he knew for a fact he was annoying the living daylights out of his co-workers and friends with his infatuation. He didn't care. He was happy. He was the happiest he had ever been. For the first time in a long time he wanted to give the world the finger not because things were going wrong, but because despite the hardships something was finally going right.

Hardships often took the form of adoption papers, of late. Will had finally secured himself a suitability interview with the service responsible for little Abigail's care, and he was fretting. One evening, he surprised Hannibal with a question neither had thought he'd ever ask.

"Can you help me pick out a suit?"

It wasn't as though Hannibal didn't know what was happening. They had talked about it, in vague, abstract terms. As much as Will didn't want to scare Hannibal off so early in their time together, this was something he refused to compromise on. He *would* have a child, and if that was something Hannibal couldn't bear, better to know now.

Hannibal, though, had accepted it with grace. He had shown no dismay towards the idea of dating a single parent. If anything, he seemed to admire Will's tenacity on the subject.

But until now, Will had not attempted to make Hannibal a *part* of it. He hadn't even told him about Abigail, beyond that she was a potential adoptee, afraid of jinxing the situation.

Hannibal recovered admirably quickly. He looked up from his book to where Will stood, nervous and uncertain in the doorway.

"Nothing you own will suffice," Hannibal said decisively, closing the book with a soft snap and rising from his chair. "We'll see my tailor."

Will laughed. "It's past six, no one's open."

"He will be."

"Hannibal, come on."

"Will," Hannibal tilted his head, in that way that made Will want to say yes to every single suggestion regardless of its absurdity. "You asked."

How Hannibal pulled it off was beyond Will's understanding. But, he supposed, it wasn't meant to be for him to understand; he didn't belong in a world of tailor-made suits and expensive fabrics, he was a simple guy. He had to admit, though, that it was very exciting to have a man and two assistants fretting over him for measurements and fit.

Will had refused anything ostentatious, he'd asked for a comfortable, durable suit that he could wear to whatever interviews or public events he had upcoming. After much discussion, and the closest Will had ever seen Hannibal come to sulking, they had settled on a grey suit with a burgundy pinstripe and lining.

"Some shirts," Hannibal announced once the jacket and pants were taken away to be properly adjusted.

"I have shirts."

"Will," Hannibal leaned in to nuzzle against him, kissing Will's cheek after. "You don't have shirts like these."

They left some time before ten, with more shirts and ties and cufflinks and accessories than Will knew what to do with in a lifetime.

Hannibal looked smug and content, having found a way to pay for all of it before Will could even wince at the thought of the bill.

"I'll pay you back," Will offered, knowing what the answer would be before he even said it.

"You'll do no such thing," Hannibal told him. "It's my pleasure to treat you."

It was something he seemed to take seriously. Will had never had a lover so attentive, so determined to care for and spoil Will. The clothes joined a menagerie of other trinkets; ticket stubs and photographs of their time together, flowers dried from nights out. The collection

was beginning to outgrow Will's little dresser. The morning he was meant to attend his interview, he found himself staring at it with longing.

It would have been better to do this with Hannibal at his side. Better to cement their lives together. There would be nothing tying Hannibal to Will, or to Abigail, should Will's plan succeed. He could walk away at any time.

Will's heart hurt. He would choose a child over Hannibal, should he have to, but he had known from the moment they met that Hannibal was the person he'd been searching for for the whole of his adult life.

No. He had to keep his head clear, he had to be entirely present for this or he could lose his chance at adopting the tiny thing that had been haunting his sleep since the moment he laid eyes on her.

He dressed in his gorgeous suit as though he was heading into battle.

The interview went surprisingly well. Surprising, only because the entire process had felt like one step forward two steps back the entire time Will had been working at it. This felt almost… too simple. As though there was something he was missing, something he'd forgotten to do. And yet the lady who had spoken with Will was offering to take him through to the visiting room to let him meet Abigail for the first time.

Will was proud of himself for not tripping over his own feet at the chance.

The room was minimally outfitted, a sofa, a couple of chairs, a small play table with tired looking toys and half-used crayons. There was a two-way mirror on one wall that was framed with smiling suns and cartoon birds. There was another door that was camouflaged into the wall that Will assumed led through to the actual facility that Abigail was being housed in.

He sat when he was asked to sit, he held himself as calmly as he possibly could as the woman knocked on the camouflaged door before beeping herself through with a card on a lanyard around her neck. She said a few words to someone on the other side, reached in…

And there she was.

She looked even more fragile in person. A beautiful little girl with enormous eyes and straight hair and a mouth that seemed permanently stuck in a frown. There was still a wide bandage around her neck, which was poorly hidden by a bright bandana, as though Abigail herself didn't know what it was there for.

Will didn't realize he was standing until the woman stepped nearer, and lowered Abigail down to the play mat. She stared up at Will with bright eyes and an expression that spoke of wisdom beyond her two years. She was perfect. Will was absolutely smitten.

"Abigail," the woman used that awful syrupy tone people often take with children that brought a bad taste to Will's mouth. "This is Mr. Graham. Do you want to say hi?"

Abigail looked him up and down, a long, searching look that felt to Will like judgement. Then she pushed herself to her feet and toddled across the room to the play table.

The woman sighed, sounding unsurprised, but a bit frazzled. “I’m sorry, Mr. Graham, she’s very shy.”

She didn’t seem shy to Will. There was no hesitance or wariness in her gaze. On the contrary, she had dismissed Will confidently and fearlessly, stumbling off to find something more interesting.

She was only two, and she’d been through a lot. Will was unsurprised to learn she had little use for those around her. Trust would come eventually, affection even slower.

Will had a fisherman’s patience. He didn’t mind.

“I wouldn’t take this as a bad sign,” Abigail’s social worker informed him. “Children who have experienced trauma can take some time to feel comfortable with new people.”

“I’m not worried about it,” Will said, rising from his seat. “She can do whatever makes her feel comfortable.”

He approached the play table slowly, allowing Abigail time to take him in. She had taken up one of the two available dolls, and was meticulously ridding it of all of its worn clothing. She looked at him suspiciously, or as suspiciously as a toddler could manage, but made no attempt to flee when Will settled down across from her.

“Don’t mind me,” he said. “You go ahead.”

Abigail continued her struggle with the doll, though she kept one eye on Will. She started on the other doll, the shirt getting caught on the plastic hands.

“Would you like me to help you?” Will offered.

“Abby do it,” she said, quiet, but stern. Her voice was slightly raspy, withering from disuse.

Will nodded and remained where he was. He watched her more out of the corner of his eye, he didn’t stare her down. In a way, this was like approaching one of his dogs; creatures skittish but tired of being so, still wary and distrustful but hopeful, always hopeful. After a few minutes, Will took up a piece of paper and a crayon, peeling back the paper surrounding it to give himself something to work with.

As he drew, he didn’t ask Abigail to contribute, nor to judge his artistic skills. He sketched and she set out the unwanted clothing next to the newly-bared dolls. But in the end, her toddler curiosity won over and she pushed herself up on her toes to look at what Will was doing. He didn’t hide his work, but he deliberately didn’t show it to her either. He waited for her to shift closer, tiny step after tiny step, getting near enough to see.

Will had drawn out a vague shape of a vest, laid out flat, and was coloring it. He’d played with paper dolls as a kid, and had found himself entirely immersed in the process for hours. Carefully cutting out shapes and folding them over the smiling outlines of the daddy and

mommy and baby dolls. He didn't know how much time they'd have together this first time, but when he returned, he'd bring her a set of paper dolls to play with. For the moment, he would make do.

When he finished, he reached for the safety scissors and started to cut it out.

All the while, Abigail watched, eyes bright and curious, mouth still set in a frown far too adult for her chubby cheeks. When Will was finished, when he'd cut out the holes for the arms as well, he held it out to her as a peace offering.

She looked from him to the vest, then back again. After a moment, her little hand shot out, yanking the paper out of his grasp. She shuffled back around to the dolls, draping the paper outfit over one of the naked toys. Then she began to murmur, tapping the dolls across the table.

Will let her play for a few minutes, until the tension left her little body. "What are they doing?" He finally asked.

"Daddy hunt," Abigail said, glancing at him, eyes narrowed.

"I prefer fishing," Will told her. She blinked, pausing in her tapping.

"Catch a fish?" She asked.

"Sometimes."

"Want a fish," she decided.

"Well, maybe you and I could go catch one, sometime."

Abigail glanced over Will's shoulder, towards the social worker who'd been watching them cautiously.

"Go out?" She finally asked, turning back to Will hopefully. "Outside? Go out?"

"I'd really like that," he admitted, giving her a smile. Will had always enjoyed communicating with kids because they were remarkably talented at reading faces; any lie, any misgiving, any hesitation and they'd know it. Most kids grew out of it. Will never had. Speaking with kids made him feel… seen, in a way that most adults didn't see him. "Would you like to go out with me? To catch some fish, or go for a walk?"

Abigail glanced over his shoulder again, almost staring the social worker down. Then she blinked, a strangely languid gesture, and moved her eyes back to Will.

"I dunno," she finally admitted, but she wasn't frowning anymore. She was watching Will, seeking more from him; some kind of assurance, some kind of promise that she could hold him to and feel like she had control over. Will wished with all his being he could give her that. He wanted to give her that, and spend the rest of his life proving to her, showing her, that she could trust him, that he would never betray that.

“Or I could bring one of my dogs over to meet you,” he added, turning his body a little more so they were facing each other properly. “Do you like dogs?”

Abigail blinked, but her eyes had lit up. “Kinda dogs?” She asked.

“All kinds,” Will replied, he was smiling wider too. For a moment he forgot that they were being monitored, that they were in a facility; it was just him and a little girl sharing a moment of mutual joy at the thought of animals. “I have seven dogs. Big dogs and little ones. Fluffy and smooth ones.”

“I like dogs,” Abigail replied, and there was that awe, that magical power of a child’s true enthusiasm and pleasure. Will had to fight everything in his power not to reach out and touch her little hand. She’d stopped paying attention to the dolls entirely; Will had all her focus.

“That’s good,” Will said, “They’ll like you too.”

Abigail nodded, with toddler confidence; of course they would like her, who wouldn’t?

Will glanced at the social worker again. Her face was placid and calm, but her eyes had gone slightly wide. Perhaps Abigail had mistrusted nurses, who in her mind would be the reason for pain and discomfort, and who didn’t take her home or at the very least out of the hospital. Whatever it was, it was clear that she had not relaxed so easily for anyone else.

“Next time,” Will said, turning back to Abigail, “I’ll bring you Winston.”

“Him fluffy?” Abigail asked, one eyebrow raised as though Will had better not offer anything less.

“Extremely,” Will assured her.

Abigail gave him another decisive nod. “You bring Win-son,” She said, turning back to her dolls. This time, she handed one to Will, the one that was still naked.

“What are we playing?” he asked.

Abigail shrugged. The dolls seemed to be the appeal in and of themselves, with the story being far less important. Will let her lead him through some tapping, listening to her whisper tales to herself that seemed largely made up of baby-babble.

When a nurse joined them in the room and settled a hand on Abigail’s shoulder, she looked up with irritation. “Go ‘way.”

“I’m sorry, sweetheart, but Mr. Graham has to go now.”

It took a lot for Will not to interrupt and correct her. He had nowhere else to be, nowhere else he wanted to be in that moment but spending time with this little girl. He wanted to take her away from here, bundle her up, bring her home to his dogs and let her discover for herself who she wanted to be and with whom.

“Don’ go,” Abigail told Will, her eyes narrowed and her brow furrowed in a frown. Will looked at the social worker and she shook her head. Their time was up, and despite how much Will wanted to stay, and despite how much she may have wanted to allow it, this went higher; it was out of her hands.

“I’ll bring Winston next time,” Will told her again, "he’ll be so excited to meet you.”

“Don’ go now,” she said again, voice starting to pull into a whine of displeasure. Will swallowed the lump in his throat. He reached out carefully, and when Abigail didn’t resist, took her little hand and hooked his little finger over hers.

“This is a promise,” he told her quietly, leaning in, “my promise, that I’ll come back as soon as I can, and bring Winston, and take you for a walk with him, and teach you how to catch fish with me.”

Abigail made a displeased sound and her face bunched up. Will glanced at the nurse, who pursed her lips but inclined her head, and sank to his knees from the little chair he’d sat on to draw Abigail into an embrace. It wasn’t tight, just there, an offer of security if she wanted to take it.

“I’ll come back,” he murmured.

Abigail burst into tears. Loud, unbearable. It must have been just about every emotion she’d felt since she’d woken up in the hospital, all bundled up into one hysterical moment. Will didn’t care what the social worker thought of him; he scooped her up, rising to his feet and rocking her gently in his arms.

She felt right, there. Even crying, even rubbing her running nose against his shoulder and wailing, she filled the hole that had been ripping through the center of Will’s life.

“It’s okay,” he told her, “I’m coming back.”

“You *not!”* she yelled, smacking one of her little fists.

“I am,” he promised, holding her just a bit tighter. “As soon as I can.”

It did little to soothe Abigail. Eventually, when her sobs became breathless hiccups, the nurse approached Will again. He had no choice but to hand her over, to untangle her fists from his clothes even as her cries rose in pitch once more.

It killed him to watch her leave, to see her carried off, back into the hospital. The gaping hole felt bigger without her there.

“You’re good with her,” the social worker said softly. “That’s a good sign. And as painful as it is, she needed a good cry.”

“Don’t we all?” Will murmured.

“I think you’d be a good father, Mr. Graham,” she told him. “Although I have some concerns about your job. Abigail needs a lot of attention, a lot of help, and you’re a very busy man.”

“My work can be adjusted,” he replied, eyes still on the door that Abigail had been carried through. “I can lecture and consult without going into the field. I can take a sabbatical. My job doesn’t matter when she… when she needs me.”

The social worker gave Will a gentle look and guided him out of the room again. He signed himself out, found that he didn’t have to plead as much as he’d anticipated to see Abigail again soon, *soon* soon. He was told he could see her in two days’ time for another hour, and that they could meet outside in the closed courtyard if he brought his dog with him.

Will felt hollow as he drove home, he felt unmoored. He’d even forgotten that he and Hannibal had a dinner date that evening until the man showed up at his door.

“I brought dinner,” Hannibal said, noting with a smile that Will had already changed into comfortable clothes for bed. “When you didn’t call today I assumed you had had a difficult time, I didn’t want to disturb you.”

“Sorry,” Will rubbed his eyes as he let Hannibal in, the dogs swarmed him quietly, seeking pets and treats, and backed up when Hannibal stepped further into Will’s home. “It went… it felt right. Us talking, her letting me share her space. She didn’t want me to leave.”

Will knew that that hardly meant anything, children clung to what was interesting, made friends and enemies of the same people in the space of five minutes and forgot the conflict just as quickly. Will blinked when Hannibal touched his shoulder, closed his eyes as he leaned in to kiss Will gently on the lips.

Hannibal’s presence drew away the tension from Will’s muscles as one drew poison from a wound. Will knew that his life had meaning with Hannibal in it, that it would feel complete with Abigail there with them.

Them. together.

“I don’t know what I’ll do if they reject my application,” Will mumbled against Hannibal’s shoulder, gaze far away and mind whirring with worries.

“They won’t,” Hannibal assured him. He nudged Will backwards, until he could settle him onto the couch and drape a blanket around his shoulders.

“They might,” Will insisted. “Abigail’s social worker thinks I work too much, and she’s right. My job can be dangerous, and I never know when it’ll take me away. She thinks I won’t have the time to give Abigail what she needs.”

Hannibal cupped Will’s jaw, his hand large and warm. Will leaned into it with a soft sigh.

“You aren’t in this alone, Will,” Hannibal said gently. “I know you were set on this before you met me, I know you would do it without me, but you don’t *have* to. I wouldn’t leave you to struggle if there was a way I could help you.”

“I can’t ask you to do that,” Will insisted. “I can’t just force a child on you.”

“I have an abundance of free time,” Hannibal told him. “And the skills to assist with trauma. It’s no hardship.”

It wasn’t *parental* , not exactly, but the offer was clearly genuine. Hannibal showed no reluctance, no desire to flee, and Will loved him so fully in that moment that it hurt to breathe.

“Marry me,” He said. It tumbled from his lips, out in the air, too late to snatch it back. Will didn’t want to. “I know it’s fast,” he said, voice picking up speed as he began to ramble, “I know it’s only been a few months, I know I’m being ridiculous, but this is the happiest I’ve ever been, Hannibal. And it’d be great for Abigail. Not that I wouldn’t want this anyway, of course I would, *god* , Hannibal, you don’t know what you do to me, I--”

Hannibal kissed him, a gentle press of lips that turned into something more intimate, more grounding.

That was his answer, no words needed, no pomp of frippery. He would marry Will Graham because he was interesting, and because Hannibal was curious. He wanted to see what Will would do, he wanted to see how the two of them could raise a child who had come through such trauma, and he wanted to see what Abigail would become, with guidance.

She already had such potential.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

And Abigail…

Hannibal had not been around children her age in a long, long time, and the last time had been…

Suffice to say, he was curious. He was curious enough to take on this endeavor with Will, he was curious enough to genuinely offer the child support as she progressed through her life, dealing with the trauma that almost ended it. But she was also at an age where even the slightest influence could trigger a landslide into something extraordinary.

Chapter Notes

Never fear, you heathens, shit will hit the fan soon enough ;) just give us a few more chapters to make everything very very happy first.

Will arrived at the next appointed meeting time early, and was guided to take a seat with Winston in the lobby waiting area.

The same social worker who had interviewed Will and supervised his last meeting with Abigail greeted him not long after, and had him follow her through the facility to an enclosed courtyard. There were trees here, a large patch of soft grass. Some benches dotted about in the shade and the sun, some weather-proof bean bags and children's plastic furniture.

"She asked for you," the woman said, and Will blinked, tilting his head.

"She did?"

"She asked about the man with the dogs," the social worker clarified with a shrug, but she was smiling. Will couldn't help but smile too. That was a good sign, right? That she remembered him? That she asked about him?

"I got engaged," Will blurted out. "I'm… my fiance and I are looking to do something small, make the paperwork official. The… Abigail would have a home with two parents. My... he's a doctor. A psychologist."

The social worker cocked her head to the side, her eyes thoughtful. “We’ll need to run clearances on him.”

“He was one step ahead of you,” Will said with a wry smile. From his bag, he drew copies of the same paperwork he himself had filled out, with Hannibal’s information neatly penned in. “He said he’ll make time for interviews, but he didn’t want to come to a visit without permission.”

The social worker took the sheets, rifling through them. There was a small smile tugging at her lips. “He’s a very thorough man, your fiance.”

“Thorough doesn’t even begin to cover it,” Will muttered. Beside him, Winston perked up, his ears at attention, paws shifting impatiently.

Abigail had entered the courtyard, hand in hand with a nurse. When she saw Will, there was a moment of blank confusion, before recognition dawned on her face.

“Back,” she said, loud and accusing. Then her eyes alighted on Winston, and the brilliant, overwhelming *joy* on her face made something tighten painfully in Will’s chest. She gave a shriek, pure toddler pleasure, and tore free from the nurse’s grasp, crossing the courtyard as fast as her little legs could carry her.

Winston was no stranger to childish affection, and met her running hug with a *boof* and a wagging tail. He was taller than Abigail, standing, but that hardly seemed to bother her. She buried her face and hands in his fur and nuzzled him, mumbling happy baby babble against him. The nurse gestured something to the social worker and the other nodded. She left. Just the three of them once more, and Winston.

The social worker gave Will a smile and moved away to take a seat on one of the shaded benches, giving Will and Abigail all the space they needed.

Will knelt beside his dog, uncaring for his suit and the dewy grass, and watched Abigail take her time touching and getting to know the large orange dog. She’d pulled back now, and was running curious and gentle hands over Winston’s muzzle, tugging lightly at his ears, stroking his shoulders and down to his big paws.

“He fluffy,” she announced happily, and gave Will a grin, the first true smile he’d ever seen on her. It tore his heart and made it feel full all at once.

“He is,” Will agreed. “I knew you’d like him.” He didn’t remind Abigail that he’d kept his promise, now wasn’t the time. She was engrossed in touching the dog in front of her, laughing when Winston ducked his head to sniff her hair noisily. He gave a gentle command for Winston to lie down and he did, allowing Abigail easier access to his face and lolling tongue.

Will had brought her the paper dolls, too. Those he’d give to her a bit later, when he had some of her attention again. For the moment, he just watched her interact with his dog, watched the way Winston brought her out of her shell.

“Big, *big* doggy,” Abigail praised Winston, patting the top of his head.

“Not my biggest,” Will told her. She looked at Winston, wide eyed, and then raised her hand as high above her head as she could.

“Big?” She asked, her voice high and disbelieving. Will held his hand up a few inches above hers.

“Big,” he confirmed.

Abigail looked down at Winston, her blue eyes narrowed with pleasure. She reached for Will, tugging his sleeve. “We go?”

It was the first time *she* had reached out, and Will’s breath caught in his throat. “Soon,” he rasped. “Soon, I promise.”

She looked uncertain, lips pursed, her grip tightening on Will’s sleeve. “Soon.” She repeated. “Soon, promise.”

“I promise,” Will repeated. He gently untangled her hand from his sleeve and pressed a kiss to the knuckles. “In the meantime, would you like a present?”

"Present?" Abigail's eyes widened, somehow, further. Will hoped he didn't overwhelm her too much that she'd get upset. He wanted to spend the hour with her, talking, playing together. He wanted to keep all his promises.

Will had cleared the gift with Abigail's social worker, but took it out of his bag as though only he and Abigail were allowed to see.

It was a book of paper dolls. The covers were harder card, and the pages between glossy with bright designs and pictures. At the back, were four dolls to play with, a mommy, daddy, and two kids of indeterminate gender. Will flipped through the book to show Abigail before handing it over to her.

"Is mine?"

"Yes, it's all yours. It's just for you."

Abigail took the book so gently Will worried for a moment that he *had* upset her. But she wasn't hesitant so much as disbelieving. Will doubted she'd been allowed many of her things from her own home, and here all toys were shared and preloved.

"Is dress up," Abigail confirmed, looking at Will from beneath her floppy fringe. Will smiled and nodded. Abigail suddenly grinned again, bright and childish, and bounced in the balls of her feet. "We dress up!" She exclaimed, planting her butt down right there in the grass and opening the book to the back where the dolls were.

She couldn't figure out how to pop them out, but Will allowed her her time before offering his help. He remembered how independent she'd been last time, determined to do it on her own. But this time she made a fussy little noise and turned the book to Will for him to help her.

Carefully, Will removed each doll from the page. Abigail held them all with as much somber reverence as a toddler could manage, laying them out in the grass before her. Then she turned her eyes on the clothes.

There was no rhyme or reason to which outfits Abigail selected, no regard for matching patterns or even size. The daddy doll ended up in a dress. One of the children was absolutely swamped by a suit. Skirts went on upside down.

For a while, she was content to just dress them, demanding new outfits as quickly as Will could punch them out. Quiet concentration, until she was absolutely *certain* Will had removed every single article of clothing from the book, and then the process began all over again with the neat pile of paper.

Will let her indulge for a few minutes, and then tentatively reached out for the daddy doll. Abigail's gaze flickered to him when he picked it up, wary, suspicious.

"What should he wear to work?" Will asked her.

Abigail was *thrilled* to have him defer to her expertise. She babbled at him, sometimes too quick to understand, and provided him outfit after outfit for every situation he could think of. Parties. School. Vacation.

"Christmas?" He suggested, tapping on the child doll that Abigail seemed to prefer.

"Hammikah." She insisted sternly, selecting a tutu.

"Hanukkah," Will agreed, making a mental note to do more research. The social worker hadn't mentioned religion before, and winter was coming fast.

Abigail dressed the child doll, and then pulled the mommy doll close and inspected her options. Then she thrust the doll to Will and demanded:

"Pants."

Will reached for the pile of clothes and pulled out some jeans.

"No, *pants."* she corrected him. Will returned the jeans and found another pair of trousers in the mix. Next to him, Winston stretched with a groan and settled on his side. Abigail grinned at him, and accepted the pants Will passed over, deeming them appropriate. On top, she insisted on folding down another upside down skirt with a jacket on top, despite the skirt sticking out.

Then she climbed over the dolls, over Will's outstretched legs, and sat next to Winston again, stroking his side.

"He likes when you rub his belly," Will encouraged her, and Abigail promptly moved her hand to stroke Winston's fuzzy stomach. The dog happily rolled over onto his back, legs akimbo, and presented his belly from a different angle. Abigail shrieked in joy and patted him more enthusiastically.

Will couldn't stop watching her, he was absolutely enthralled by this little thing, this tiny beautiful girl who had refused to die, refused to have her light be put out so soon. He reached around Abigail to pet Winston too, and held his breath as she wriggled back to lean her back against his arm.

"You should tell him he's a good boy," Will prompted. "He needs to be reminded sometimes, he can't reach the mirror in the bathroom to see."

"Goo-boy." Abigail told Winston decisively, turning to Will with a smile after. It took everything not to kiss the top of her head, to wrap his arm around her middle and tug her into his lap. He wanted to read her stories, he wanted to take her to the stream and let her splash around in the shallows. He wanted to do everything with her, he wanted to see her grow and bloom.

When time was up, Will felt like he'd been gutted. Like Abigail had reached inside of him and was taking his organs with her.

She put up the same protest she had the last time, clinging to Will and shrieking in outrage when she was pried from his grasp.

"Come back!" She yelled at him, her voice cracking. "Back!"

"I will," Will promised, handing the book of dolls over to her social worker. "As soon as I can."

It didn't stop her little sniffling tears, nor did it mend the ache.

"Next time, bring your fiance," the social worker said. "I'll start filing the paperwork. I think once he's been cleared and he's met Abigail, we can take the next step and give you some visitation."

Will swallowed, speechless, and nodded.

Hannibal had already prepared dinner when Will arrived back at Wolf Trap, but he turned the burner off when he saw Will's face, scrunched up in obvious distress.

"She cried again," Will whispered, and then he too began to cry.

Hannibal held him, enveloping Will in his embrace and rocking them gently where they stood. He said nothing, he didn't offer soothing words that would fall flat regardless of their sincerity. He let Will cry and held him so he knew he wasn't alone, and when Will pulled back and wrapped his arms around Hannibal's shoulders, he kissed his cheek.

"They took the paperwork," Will mumbled after a moment, "her social worker asked us to come to the next meeting together, so she could meet you." Will pulled back and wiped his eyes, smiling now, though his eyes were still wet.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Hannibal assured him. Will sniffed and laughed, shaking his head.

“How did I find you?” He sighed, leaning in to kiss Hannibal chastely on the lips. Then not so chastely, though neither went further than nuzzling close and breathing each other in.

“Dinner is minutes from being done,” Hannibal whispered, kissing Will’s temple gently. “I’ve let the dogs out, and fed them.”

“Stop,” Will laughed, pressing a hand to his face. “You’re too good. I already fucked up the proposal.”

“You did no such thing,” Hannibal assured him, kissing Will again before letting him free, and returning to dinner.

That night he made love to Will as they lay side by side, one hand caught behind Will’s knee to hold him open, the other wrapped around his chest, holding him close. Will dropped his head back and moaned, stroking himself brutally until he came. Hannibal made him come again before he allowed himself his own release, and Will slept like the dead.

When Hannibal first met Abigail, she stared him down.

Will had brought Winston again and he was a good buffer for everyone. Hannibal took no offence to being ignored for the majority of their time together, he instead watched the way Abigail clung to Will and the dog. And she did cling to him. Now that Will had returned for the third time, she seemed adamant that he never leave again.

And Will… Will was so good with her. He played with anything she gave him, agreed with her babbling commentary, held her so gently when she sat deliberately in his lap and stroked Winston. When Abigail finally decided Hannibal was worth giving the time of day to, he treated her like a little princess, and that sat just fine with the toddler.

By the end of their session, she was crying about Hannibal leaving just as hard as she was about Will.

“She liked you,” Will said, breathless with relief. His eyes were damp again, and he went easily when Hannibal pulled him close.

“I was rather enraptured myself,” Hannibal assured him.

The social worker had more papers for Will, and questions for Hannibal, but when they left it was with a date and time on a sheet of paper crushed to irreparable wrinkles in Will’s fist.

“Overnight,” he whispered, “we get her overnight.”

This was not where Hannibal had ever foreseen his life going. He had expected to field questions about his bachelorhood for the rest of his days, perhaps encouraging rumours about a closeted sexuality. Will had been a surprise, but not an unwelcome one.

Family made Hannibal seem more normal, more approachable. Single, he’d given off a stern aura, and had drawn attention. Now, he would fit comfortably into the bubbles people often made for each other. Nothing about him would stand out. He would blend into the crowd.

And there were benefits to Will, himself, and not just to the relationship they'd founded. Clever, sharp-tongued, ruggedly handsome. As far as distractions went, Hannibal could have done a lot worse.

And was not entirely sure he could have done any *better* .

He was curious what life would be like when they married, when they adopted Abigail and brought her home -- he had no doubts that they would pass with flying colors in regards to both their residences until they bought a home together. Currently, he knew just which buttons to push to have Will sleeping soundly as Hannibal went about killing his sounders, as it were, but with a toddler…

It would be a welcome challenge. Everything in life had been, thus far, and this was perhaps Hannibal's most critical. Should he succeed, should a family life work around his schedule, he would be the farthest from a suspect to the FBI, should any hints of a whiff of his presence at a scene be ever noted. He doubted it ever would be but… Will was clever. And while he himself wasn't working the Ripper case, he had access to the files, he taught Hannibal's processes in lectures.

Walking that fine line, that razor's edge, was absolutely thrilling to Hannibal. In truth, he hadn't felt so giddy in a long time. He felt truly alive again.

He and Will agreed to forgo a wedding ceremony for the time being and elope instead. It was quicker, and once the paperwork was through it would help them in the process of adopting young Abigail. They kept both surnames, a hyphen between, and when Hannibal kissed Will after, the other man's arms wrapped tight around his neck, hands holding their new documents proclaiming them to be the Graham-Lecters, he felt truly content.

If Hannibal thought about it, and he did, on occasion, he was incredibly fond of Will. He wouldn't go so far as to say he loved him, love was tricky, but he was very fond. It wasn't a chore to spend time together, and Will's flaws fascinated him as much as the rest of him did. And Abigail…

Hannibal had not been around children her age in a long, long time, and the last time had been…

Suffice to say, he was curious. He was curious enough to take on this endeavor with Will, he was curious enough to genuinely offer the child support as she progressed through her life, dealing with the trauma that almost ended it. But she was also at an age where even the slightest influence could trigger a landslide into something extraordinary.

"This one looks good," Will mumbled, derailing Hannibal's train of thought. They were sitting in bed, Hannibal had his glasses on, his iPad in front of him, though he wasn't reading a word on the screen. It had gone black, actually. Will had propped up his laptop on his knees, his own glasses slid low down his nose as he considered the listing more closely.

They'd started looking for a home together as soon as they married. Both were still in the process of changing their legal names on every bank account, driver's licence, and FBI clearance badge they had.

Hannibal looked over, setting his chin against Will's shoulder.

The house was large and had a sizable yard and garden. The dogs would be comfortable, and the relative seclusion would allow Will to feel like he wasn't bang in the middle of a city. It was also close enough for Hannibal to commute comfortably to and from work.

"I suppose we'd better put in a bid," Hannibal replied quietly, smiling when he felt Will's grin against his cheek. Will kissed there, a gentle and loving thing, and rested his head against Hannibal's.

"Guess we should," he said.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

“Abigail,” Will said gently. “Do you remember what we talked about?”

“No,” Abigail said happily, all of her focus on petting Winston.

“About you moving out of the hospital. Did your social worker remind you?”

“Moving with Will,” Abigail recited. “Going home.”

Will nodded. “Going home for good,” he said gently. “Staying here, with me.”

We need fluff right now, all of us.

Will got stuck in the paint aisle.

He had also gotten stuck on the house hunting app, when it was time to pick which of the bedrooms would be Abigail’s, and when selecting a car seat.

But now he was stuck on paint. They couldn’t select the furniture or the rugs or any of the decorations until they’d painted the room, and he didn’t know where to begin.

He could go classic. Pink was a lovely color, pale and gentle and calming. Little girls liked pink.

But then he was contributing to gender stereotypes, and perhaps Abigail would grow to resent having it forced on her. Perhaps she would be the sort of girl with no use for pink and frills.

Or perhaps she *would* like pink, and be upset that Will had painted her room a less appealing color.

Maybe it would be too dark. Or too bright. Maybe once every wall was painted, Will would realize the color looked horrible.

He stood there, looking helplessly at a dozen swatches in his hands. Hannibal was off with the employee, discussing primer. Because he would be helping to paint the room, and to raise the child. Because he was Will’s *husband* now.

Will moved his thumb over his wedding band, turning it around and around his finger in a meditative way as he let his eyes glaze for a moment. Zoning out. Away from making paint decisions, and back to the first weekend Abigail got to spend with them.

It had gone so well, she'd loved all the dogs, had demanded to sleep in one of the dog beds for her nap, one little hand curled in Winston's fur, the other in her mouth as she sucked her thumb. She'd cried when the social worker came to pick her up, but this time when Will held out his pinkie finger, she curled her own around it.

Promise.

He'd always kept his promises to her. She was slowly starting to cling to that word like a liferaft.

And now… now she was coming home. In a week she would be coming home, once all the paperwork was finalized, once the last checks were run, Abigail would be going to her new home with her new family, forever.

Will jerked back to reality when someone ran a cart into the side of the shelves and swore quietly. Will swallowed, considering the color patches in his hands again. Perhaps a feature wall, just one wall of bright color for her to enjoy, the rest a soothing light grey or beige until she grew up and wanted to change it. They could always change it, it was their home, and it would be her room, always.

"Yellow," Will said, as he heard Hannibal step up next to him again. "I think we should have one wall yellow, the rest pale. We can put her dresser and bookcases up against it, maybe a dollhouse."

"Every little one should have a dollhouse," Hannibal agreed. He wrapped an arm around Will's waist, holding him close. "You're trembling," he murmured, too quiet for anyone else to hear.

"I don't want to get it wrong," Will whispered back.

"She's not yet three," Hannibal told him. "And she hasn't had a room of her own in quite some time. I'm sure she'll love whatever we pick."

"There's so much to do," Will mumbled. "She can't come home to a room without toys." They'd supplied her with some, of course, but not *enough* . Not the amount a normal toddler would have acquired. "And then there's her birthday, and Hanukkah not long after that, and I wanted to do Christmas as well, and I still owe you a proper ceremony and honeymoon, and I don't know *when* we'll have time for that--"

"When she goes to college," Hannibal said with a wry smile, "And not a minute sooner. Will, the last thing you should be worried about right now is me."

"You're a people person," Will said. "Before me, you threw elaborate dinner parties. You can't tell me you didn't want a proper wedding."

Hannibal turned him gently and set both hands to Will's cheeks, holding him still. "I wanted to marry you," he clarified, "and I've done that. The rest is pomp and frippery."

Will swallowed, but he was smiling, that little half-tick at the corner of his mouth that suggested he was moments away from laughing. Hannibal kissed him instead, entirely unashamed, in the middle of the store. Will was still getting used to that, too.

He sighed, leaning against Hannibal after, the swatches still in his hands. “So,” he murmured. “Yellow?”

“Yellow,” Hannibal agreed, picking the swatch from the selection Will had taken, and moving off to get the paint mixed up for them at the counter. Will wrapped his arms around himself and watched him walk away, wondering when the hell he’d gotten so damn lucky.

A week later, Will was pacing their new living room, hands twisting together, as they waited for Abigail to be dropped off with all her things. They’d wanted to come and pick her up, but due to her circumstances, they felt it would be best if she arrived at their house with her social worker to see her off.

Hannibal caught Will around the waist as he turned on his heel to work a trench through the carpet again and held him still.

“Breathe for me,” he said, smiling, and Will snorted, shaking his head. After a moment, he obediently breathed deeply in and back out again. “Everything is perfect. Everything will be fine.”

“I know,” Will whispered, pressing a hand to his face. “I think that’s why I’m scared. I’m not used to things going right.”

Will was a fascinating creature. This was why Hannibal had stayed, why he’d indulged Will’s unexpected (though not entirely unwelcome) advances. Even when Will had introduced the idea of children, something Hannibal had never craved, Hannibal had not been able to look away.

He was, in equal measures, confident and terrified. Brilliant and cowed. There was a trembling strength to him. He was not one to be dismayed from something he wanted, even as nervousness and stress both threatened to take him over.

He would be so easy to build up. Easy to break, too, if Hannibal twisted himself into Will’s space thoroughly enough, entwined himself.

But he wanted to see where this went. How Will changed with Hannibal’s influence. What his influence could do to Abigail, so young and impressionable.

Perhaps nothing. Perhaps Hannibal would one day leave them in peace, a happy little family. He had not yet decided.

“She’s going to love you,” Hannibal said softly, and he did mean it. There was already an attachment there. Abigail was surprisingly resilient; her trauma had not closed her off.

“She’ll love you, too,” Will insisted. “She… I want her to be *ours* .”

Hannibal kissed him, just a soft, chaste thing, and held Will close until their doorbell rang.

They met the social worker at the door, Abigail at her side holding her hand. When she saw Will she babbled something and stumbled over to hug his leg, pressing her cheek against it with a sigh. Will swallowed any words he possibly had that would make him sound like a responsible adult, and just knelt down to take Abigail into his arms. Above him, Hannibal spoke to the woman quietly, thanking her for bringing Abigail home, thanking her for all her hard work to get her here.

By the time Will stood, Abigail cradled in his arms, the social worker was ready to go. She reached out to take Abigail's hand.

"You be good," she said.

"I'm always good," Abigail countered, making them all laugh. Of course she was. How could she be anything but?

Hannibal took her things, all currently in a duffel bag, and saw the social worker off. By the time he closed the door, Abigail was wriggling out of Will's arms to get to the floor.

"Where's Win-son?" she demanded, and Will laughed, whistling for the dogs to come out from the living room. Abigail shrieked in joy and ran to her favourite friend, wrapping her arms around him even as the other animals crowded her for attention and pats.

The first time, she'd been slightly overwhelmed by all the dogs. She'd clung to Will, and then to Winston, eyeing the other six canines suspiciously.

Now, after a handful of visits and even some sleepovers, she chattered happily to all of them, remembering a handful of names and butchering others. Zoe, notably, was just "Fluff."

Hannibal settled a hand at the small of Will's back, guiding him forward to the throng. Will crouched down alongside Abigail, leaning into the hand Hannibal settled on his shoulder.

"Abigail," Will said gently. "Do you remember what we talked about?"

"No," Abigail said happily, all of her focus on petting Winston.

"About you moving out of the hospital. Did your social worker remind you?"

"Moving with Will," Abigail recited. "Going home."

Will nodded. "Going home for *good,"* he said gently. "Staying here, with me."

"All weekend," Abigail said, for that had been the length of her last few visits. "Then go back."

Will reached out, taking her little hand in his. She blinked at him. "No, Abigail. No more going back. Staying here."

"Soon," Abigail said. "You said soon, Abigail stays."

"I did," Will agreed. "And that's today."

Abigail blinked at him, uncomprehending.

“This is your home,” Will told her gently. “You live here now.”

“Live here?” Abigail repeated quietly. Then, louder, “live here *now?* With Will and Hamble and Win-son? *Now?”*

Will smiled so wide his face hurt. “Yeah,” he said, his own voice pitching a bit higher. “Yeah, you live here now, with us. No one is ever going to take you away again.”

For a moment, Abigail looked like she was going to cry, eyes so wide and wet as she stared at Will, then at Hannibal, then back again. But then she just gurgled, a happy little noise that turned into a laugh.

“Live *here* now!” she repeated, moving Will’s hand about as she gestured. “Not going anywhere else.”

“Nowhere else,” Will promised. “Not without us.”

“Would you like to see your room?” Hannibal added, his own smile impossible to hide when Abigail was vibrating with excitement at his feet.

“My *room?”* Abigail let go of Will and moved to wrap her arms around Hannibal’s leg instead, looking up. “Yeah!”

“It’s upstairs,” Hannibal told her, pointing. “Do you want me to carry you?”

“No,” Abigail grinned, toddling off towards the stairs. She managed to get herself up onto the first one before sighing and turning to look over her shoulder, hands out and grasping, asking to be picked up.

Hannibal was more than happy to oblige.

Against him, she felt absolutely tiny. She didn’t cling to him like she did to Will, but she rested her hand decisively on his chest and looked over her shoulder so she could see where she was being carried. Hannibal tucked a lock of hair behind her ear.

Abigail’s room was huge for a toddler, so it would work as a playroom as well, until she grew into it and needed all the space. One wall was just windows overlooking the backyard, the wall across from that was painted a bright happy yellow, and hosted two bookcases and a dresser. Against another wall was a tiny vanity for Abigail to play with, a box filled with toys, and a bed with a pink princess canopy over it. Against the other, was a doll house the size of Abigail herself.

Abigail made a sound, breathless and high. She looked over Hannibal’s shoulder at Will, mouth agape.

“ *My* room?” She said. “ *Abby’s* room?”

“Abby’s room,” Will confirmed.

Abigail began to squirm in Hannibal’s arms, impatient. “Down!” She demanded. “Down down down!”

The second her little feet touched the floor, she bolted, careening from one end of the room to the other, touching everything in sight. She ran her fingers over the gossamer fabric of the canopy, tugged at the blankets to test their softness. Then it was off to the books, tugging a handful off the shelves, staring in awe at the covers. She started to carry those to Will, then got distracted, abandoning them in the middle of the floor when she remembered the dollhouse.

The dollhouse had been Hannibal’s doing, and it showed. It was meticulously detailed, a far cry from plastic Barbie dream houses. This had shingles and carpeting, and a family of tiny dolls, two daddies and a little girl, that could be dressed and undressed at Abigail’s discretion.

“Hamble!” Abigail crowed, holding up the doll in a tiny suit.

"Yes, sweet girl, that's me," he said, stepping into the room and crouching beside her. "And this one?"

"This Will!" She laughed, showing the doll to Will, who could barely contain his own emotions at seeing his husband and their daughter -- *theirs* -- interacting so easily.

"And this?" Hannibal held the little girl doll in the palm of his hand.

"Abby," she grinned, bouncing on the balls of her feet. There were little dog toys in the house as well, though not nearly as many as the real ones that had followed them upstairs. A couple meandered by Will's feet while some stepped into the room to explore. They'd been allowed in after the paint had dried, so they could get used to the space.

"And I take," she started, still holding the daddy doll she'd grabbed, "Win-son sleep with me here. And read book and then naps."

"Anything you like," Will told her earnestly. He knew that he would need to set boundaries soon, so she could feel safe and grow like a normal little girl, but not today. Today he wanted her to feel like she could do anything in the world.

"Does Will take naps?"

"He does," Hannibal told her, sitting more comfortably on the floor in front of her. Buster happily made his way into his lap. "Will likes to take naps."

"And bath?" Abigail asked, suddenly very serious.

"And bath too," Will promised, coming to join them on the soft rug on the floor. "Every night, just like Abby."

"And Hamble."

"And Hannibal too, yes," Hannibal agreed, running his hands absently over Buster's little form.

Abigail gave a decisive little nod. “Baths good,” she declared. “I take a bath now.”

Will burst out laughing as she began to toddle past him. He wrapped an arm around her waist, tugging her into his lap. She went with a giggle, flailing her little arms and legs.

“Not yet, sweetheart,” Will told her. “It’s a little early for that. We can do a bath before bed.”

“Bed,” Abigail said, sounding wondrous.

She was easy enough to distract. She wanted to touch all her new things, making a mess of the immaculate room, pulling out every single item from every drawer and shelf. They’d need to teach her tidiness later, but for today, Will and Hannibal had agreed to allow whatever comforted her. She deserved a chance to explore, to see what was being offered to her.

They had chicken for dinner, which Abigail loved, and asparagus, which she refused to touch. Will worried that Hannibal would take offense, but he took toddler demands in strides.

“Alright,” he said, giving Abigail an extra spoonful of broccoli instead. This, she ate without complaint, happy to be fed “trees.”

“Bath *now,”* Abigail demanded after, with a loud yawn.

“The princess has spoken,” Hannibal said, giving Will a look. He had more experience wrangling wriggly creatures into a tub than he did, besides, he had the kitchen to clean up. Will smiled so wide he didn’t know if he’d ever be able to stop again.

He and Hannibal had both taken time off work for the next two weeks to spend time with Abigail, and after, both were on part time hours to make the transition easier. Will had put in for a sabbatical for a year that he was still waiting to hear back on, and Hannibal was closer to home should anything happen when Will couldn’t get out of work.

They refused to leave her alone with a sitter, not for the first year, at least.

Will picked up the little girl -- their little girl -- under her arms and settled her against his hip.

“D’you want bubbles in the bath?”

“I can have *bubbles?”* she wriggled happily, and Will laughed, stroking her hair. She could have bubbles. She could have anything she wanted. She was going to be Will’s entire world, no sacrifice was too big.

“Can Win-son come?” she asked as Will carried her off upstairs.

“Not this time, love,”

“About Fluff?”

“No, not Fluff either, just you in the tub today.”

“Have boats?”

Will grinned. “Of course.”

By the time Hannibal joined them, Abigail was shrieking in joy, bubbles piled up on her head as Will tried to wrangle her closer to clean her back. She wasn’t dirty, she was a toddler, and Will was laughing helplessly trying to hold her still.

“Hamble!” Abigail grinned. “Is bubbles!”

“I see that.” Hannibal settled on his knees next to Will, depositing a finger full of bubbles into the very tip of Abigail’s nose. This was uproariously funny to her, and she immediately set about trying to return the favor, heaving little fistfuls of bubbles towards him. They landed around the floor and the rim of the bathtub, but never quite made it to his face.

This little war lasted long enough for Will to get her back and rinse the suds from her hair, until she was clean and rosy-cheeked. Will let her splash about until her fingertips wrinkled and the water cooled, and only then did he pull her from the tub.

Will had never babysat or really had any interaction with kids. He’d known he *wanted* them, that he would have given anything to be a parent, but he didn’t know where to start. He got Abigail dressed in her warm flannel pajamas and settled beside her on the bed with the hairbrush, and then froze.

“Let me,” Hannibal said. “You read.”

“Yeah, Will,” Abigail chirped, shoving a book into Will’s lap. “You read.”

While Will read about baby bats and their mothers, Hannibal took the brush and gently untangled Abigail’s long, dark hair. He braided it with a practiced skill, slightly rusty, but clearly something he’d done many times before.

When he was finished, Abigail turned into him and stuck her thumb into her mouth, cuddling up against him as Will continued to read the story.

When Will closed the book, he was looking at Hannibal like he’d hung the moon. His partner, his *husband,* was holding their little girl while Will read her a story. They were a family. Finally, after months of struggle, months of heartache, months of worries and sleepless nights, Abigail was home with them where she belonged.

“I think this one’s out for the count,” Will whispered, as Hannibal ducked his head and stroked Abigail’s cheek with gentle fingers.

“I think so,” he agreed, shifting slowly and carefully to lay Abigail down on her new bed. He slid to the floor in a kneel and tucked her in, closing the gossamer curtains around her after. Will reached out to him, tugging him close, and kissed his cheek.

“She’s home,” he murmured. Hannibal hummed, bringing a hand up to grasp Will’s and squeeze. Will snorted and nuzzled Hannibal’s cheek. “Why am *I* so tired? God, it’s not even eight.”

“Welcome to being a parent,” Hannibal told him. Will grinned.

“I wouldn’t change a thing.”

They left the room with the door open, in case she called out to them at night, waking up in a new and unfamiliar place. Winston immediately wheedled his way in and nosed through the curtains til he could climb into bed with her, Zoe close behind. The dogs wrapped around her against her back and at her feet, keeping her warm and safe.

By the time Will and Hannibal got into bed, they were half awake themselves. Excitement was overwhelming, having a bright, loud, messy toddler in their otherwise impeccable house was tiring. Will tucked his nose against Hannibal’s neck and breathed him in, spooning him as the other reached out to turn off the lights. They could see the slight glow of the night light flowing into the corridor from Abigail’s room.

Hannibal wasn’t sure when he’d fallen asleep, only that he was woken by little hands crawling their way between him and Will. Abigail was scaling them like the most experienced mountain climber. With a sigh, Hannibal shifted forward a little, and with a quiet ‘oof’, Abigail found herself a space between the two of them.

She wriggled about a little, enough to get under the blankets, and then with a deep sigh, fell asleep again with the speed only an exhausted toddler could.

Hannibal didn’t sleep for a long time, listening to the sound of his husband and their daughter breathing behind him. When he turned, he saw that Abigail had tucked herself against Will, her head beneath his chin. Hannibal reached out to stroke her back, her hair, over her silky cheek. Only then did he settle, arm heavy over both Will and Abigail as he did.

He figured he needed to get rest while he could.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

“You saw La Boheme a few months ago. You were in the society pages. Just a picture, but I knew it was you.”

“Did you?” Hannibal’s smile was a flicker at the corner of his mouth, far from genuine.

“You were with a man,” Marcus added, tone lowering an octave.

And so... we meet our antagonist... or is it catalyst?

Abigail adjusted well, except when she didn’t.

She liked her room, but wouldn’t stay in it alone. As she was not yet three, she was rarely left alone to begin with, but if Will or Hannibal so much as went to the bathroom, she would follow them out of the room and sit in the hallway, her back pressed against the bathroom door.

She liked to take baths, but didn’t like to have her hair brushed. She’d been patient the first night, but she squirmed and whined the second.

She was of an age where potty training should have been going well, but she’d regressed to being unable to control herself, or, apparently, even know she needed to go until it was already happening. Will and Hannibal stocked up on diapers and pull-ups, and Will took charge of helping her learn how to toilet properly.

She liked to be tucked into her canopied bed with fairy lights strung around it, but she didn’t like to stay there. She crawled in between Will and Hannibal every single night, sometimes kicking them with her little feet as she ended up sideways across the bed by morning.

She was not a picky eater, except when she was. Foods that had been devoured the week before could suddenly become poison, greeted with a loud ‘YUCKY’ and absolute refusal to eat them. On those nights, Will shot Hannibal increasingly alarmed looks, as if concerned his feelings might be hurt by the fickle palate of a toddler.

And then there were the tantrums.

All toddlers threw tantrums, for a variety of reasons, some of them less logical than others. Abigail could flip like a switch, cheery sunshine turning to thunderous rage in an instant. She didn’t do so every time she didn’t get her way, but once something set her off, it was nigh-impossible to calm her down. Worse, she hit. Will, Hannibal, furniture, even the dogs if she wasn’t snatched up and relocated quickly enough.

Often, these tantrums were dealt with as calmly as possible, with either Will or Hannibal holding her restrained tight against them until she'd screamed herself hoarse. Tantrums were like a flash of lightning; quick and bright, but they didn't last long. Though it could feel like forever, within three or four minutes, Abigail would calm her screaming to shaky sobs, and every time she absolutely exhausted herself.

Sometimes, it seemed as if she didn't even remember having the tantrum at all; looking up at the men holding her with wide confused eyes and reaching out for a tighter cuddle.

They were exhausted.

They were happy.

Will was forced to return to work -- just two days a week -- six weeks after bringing Abigail home, but Hannibal remained at home a few weeks longer. He hadn't ever been a child psychologist, nor a pediatric doctor, but he found that working with Abigail was eerily close to working with his adult patients. She was too mature for her age, too grown up when she should have been allowed to remain innocent for longer. They talked together a lot, and even when it felt like gibberish -- when Abigail was guiding her Daddy dolls through the dollhouse with Hannibal at her side -- it was free-flowing, it was eager and nuanced.

Hannibal himself had gone mute after his trauma.

Abigail was absolutely remarkable in that she hadn't.

It was two months into their lives together, when they were having a picnic on their lawn under the shade of the trees that Abigail first said it.

"Daddy, scone!"

Will passed it over without thinking twice. Only when the words registered did he turn, wide-eyed, to Abigail.

"What did you call me, baby?"

"Huh?" she'd dug into her scone with gusto and had crumbs around her mouth.

"Me," Will pointed to himself, his smile impossible to control. "Who am I?"

Abigail blinked at him, giving him a look that suggested she thought he'd lost his mind.

"Daddy," she repeated. "Abby's daddy Will."

They hadn't pushed it. Will had wanted Abigail to adjust on her own terms, at her own pace. The pediatrician and the store clerks all asked Abby about her "daddies," but Will and Hannibal had until now answered to "Will" and "Hannibal." Or rather, "Hammible."

It seemed Abigail had picked up on the finer details, though. She claimed them as her own, and Will's eyes were watering as he dragged her across the blanket and into his lap.

“That’s right,” he whispered into her strawberry-scented hair. “That’s right, baby girl, I’m your daddy.” He pressed a kiss to the top of her head, to her cheek. She squirmed in his lap, giggling.

“Daddy!” She shrieked, this time reaching for *Hannibal.* “Daddy, help! Him tickles!”

There was a moment where Hannibal seemed to hesitate, as though uncertain the title was meant for him. Will knew, though, and the smile stretched across his face made his cheeks ache.

“Well,” Hannibal said, shifting closer on the blanket. “We can’t have that. Daddy Will shouldn’t get to do *all* the tickling.”

“No!” Her joyful shrieking brought some of the dogs out to join in on the fun, and soon the picnic was forgotten in favor of chasing the animals around the yard while Will and Hannibal sat on the blanket and watched.

Will slipped his fingers over Hannibal’s and gently squeezed. Hannibal squeezed back. What was there to say?

By the time Hannibal returned to work, he and Will shared the week. The days Will taught, Hannibal was home, the times Hannibal had clients, Will took Abigail. She was never left alone, never left with a sitter, with a stranger. No. Will hadn’t lied when he’d told her social worker that his job didn’t matter a lick compared to Abigail. He would quit without a second thought should he need to; his family was his first priority.

Many of Hannibal’s clients had been temporarily allocated to colleagues he trusted to work their cases while he’d taken time to help Abigail adjust. Some had chosen to remain with their new therapists, and Hannibal had to admit he was relieved. Many of his patients were frightfully dull, with run-of-the-mill diagnoses that Hannibal had seen and treated a thousand times before. Yes, he still enjoyed his work, but he often wished it could offer him something more.

More curious, more interesting, more… malignant.

Which was why he was pleased to see that along with several others, Mr. Marcus Newham had returned to his care.

Marcus was a curious man; outwardly, he gave no impression of oddity or maladjustment, yet behind him were a string of restraining orders and accusations of stalking. No one had ever pressed charges, however, when push came to shove, and Marcus had, instead of prison, been ordered to see a psychiatrist.

To see Hannibal.

The first time he showed up in Hannibal’s office, he’d been wearing a t-shirt with a cheap beer logo printed across it, and ripped jeans. That had changed, over the weeks. Now, he wore a crisply ironed suit with a white button-down shirt and a paisley tie.

Hannibal owned a tie in a very similar shade.

This was how Marcus slipped so easily under the radar. He looked like an ordinary man. He simply didn't look like *himself* . A sense of self seemed difficult for him to find. He slowly adapted to the friends he made, mimicking their styles, their hobbies.

Hannibal appeared to have become his latest imprint, and that was intriguing. Hannibal couldn't be certain how deep the mimicry ran, if Marcus could be coerced into hobbies far more complex than train collecting.

"I went to see La Boheme," Marcus told him, his sharp grey eyes narrowed on Hannibal's features.

"It's always good to expand one's horizons," Hannibal said mildly.

"You saw La Boheme a few months ago. You were in the society pages. Just a picture, but I knew it was you."

"Did you?" Hannibal's smile was a flicker at the corner of his mouth, far from genuine.

"You were with a man," Marcus added, tone lowering an octave. Hannibal hummed. Yes, he'd gone with Will. Will had hated the entire experience and Hannibal spent the evening gleefully listening to Will take apart every attendee's false veneer of cultural understanding over glass after glass of wine.

He'd fucked Will over the kitchen island when they'd gotten back, with the aria from La Boheme playing over the speakers, until he'd come with a whimper and left a mess on Hannibal's pristine kitchen floor.

"My partner," Hannibal replied after a moment, blinking himself back to reality. He'd noticed that Marcus had styled his hair similar to his own today; he'd been growing it out over the weeks they hadn't had sessions together. "Now my husband."

"What's his name?"

"That's not pertinent to our session, Marcus," Hannibal said smoothly, uncrossing his legs only to cross them once more, the left over the right this time. Opposite him, Marcus moved to do the same. Not a mirror image, Hannibal noticed, but *just the same.* "Tell me, instead, how your sessions with my colleague went during my absence."

"Dull," Marcus spat the word, licking his lips after as though he'd savored it, had been waiting to toss it out between them. "She was an insufferable bore. Asking questions so primitive I'm shocked she even has a license to practice."

"Oh?" Hannibal's lips twitched again. He'd sent Marcus to Bedelia, deliberately, so she could appreciate the curiosity of the man as well. She'd sent back quite the report for Hannibal to peruse. "I'm sorry to hear that."

"I was glad to hear you were coming back," Marcus added, leaning a little closer. "We're so alike, you and I, kindred spirits so to speak. It's a relief to be able to speak with a *cultured*

man again.”

From what Hannibal could gather, Marcus had had a variety of interests over the years, some cultured, some others. The last person he’d imprinted on had been interested largely in model trains and beer. How much enjoyment Marcus truly got from any given hobby was indeterminable.

If Hannibal probed, he could pick Marcus apart. He doubted Marcus understood the opera in depth; his mimicry was superficial. He developed only enough of an interest to make himself a copy of his chosen person. Hannibal liked opera, so Marcus liked opera, and Marcus’s thoughts went no further than that.

Hannibal was too good a therapist to give in to that particular urge, and besides, he had no desire to discourage Marcus’s interest. He hadn’t had someone so malleable at his fingertips in a long while.

“You’ve never expressed an interest in the fine arts before,” Hannibal said, pretending to make a note of it.

“Oh, I’ve always loved the opera,” Marcus lied. “Just never had anyone to talk to about it. No one *appreciates* art, not like you and I.”

“It’s an acquired taste,” Hannibal noted.

“Well, I’ve acquired it,” Marcus said, his eyes hungry and dark.

Hannibal allowed himself a moment, pen poised above the paper, breath held, to imagine just how he would present this man as a tableaux if the time ever came.

Perhaps he would craft him in the style of the latest opera being performed in Baltimore, perhaps he would turn him into a favorite antagonist from a play, over-styled and over-done; fake, just as Marcus had been in life.

"Tell me what you enjoyed the most," Hannibal prompted instead. They still had half a session left.

By the time Hannibal returned home, the remnants of another tantrum were all over the living room. One of Abigail's dolls had been tossed aside, her favorite, and upon inspection Hannibal found that her little dress had been torn.

With a hum, he made his way upstairs.

He found Will dozing in the nursery, his legs hanging over the edge of the bed, and Abigail tucked up under his chin, her thumb in her mouth, as she slept on Will's chest.

This had been one of Hannibal's ideas; breathing exercises were difficult to teach to a toddler who forgot a train of thought as quickly as it arrived at the station, but telling her to follow his breathing turned it into a fun game.

Gently, he woke Will by stroking his hair from his face. He kissed him before Will could properly wake up and wake Abigail by proxy. Hannibal knelt by the bed and gestured silently to their daughter. Will half-shrugged, one hand up to rub his eyes as his other stroked down Abigail's back.

"What time is it?" He whispered. Hannibal told him. "We've been down about an hour. I think this one was my fault actually."

"Why?"

"Spilled some wine while cooking, she saw it spread across the floor. I don't think I've ever heard her scream so loudly, poor thing. Still kicking myself about it. What if she never trusts me again?"

"She trusts you now," Hannibal pointed out softly.

Will looked unconvinced, but Abigail shifted before he could speak, twisting her fist in the fabric of his shirt and holding tight.

Will's face softened, as it always did when faced with the enormity of Abigail's love for him. Perhaps he didn't see himself as deserving it, but he couldn't deny its existence.

"We should rouse her," Hannibal suggested. "She won't sleep tonight if she naps too late, and I presume you never got around to dinner?"

Will grimaced. "She's gotta be starving. I'm a bad parent."

"I suspect Abigail would disagree."

"Yeah, well, that's a pretty low bar." But a smile was tugging at Will's features, nonetheless.

"Certainly you outrank the nurses."

Will laughed. "Oh, she *hated* them."

"Shhhhhh," Came a little voice from between them. "Daddy. Daddy. Syeeping."

"Oh," Hannibal stage-whispered, leaning close to Abigail but pretending as though he were speaking to Will. "We should be very quiet then."

"Yeah," she sighed, yawning and stretching out on Will's chest. Will stroked her back and gently tugged her hair. He'd managed to get it into pigtails that morning, but they were wonky and uneven. "Daddy, no."

"Let her sleep," Hannibal continued, tone much the same as he caught Will's eye. "She's too tired to help Papa make mashed potatoes for dinner."

"Tatoes?" Abigail blinked up at him. "I like tatoes."

“And if she doesn’t want to help Papa,” Hannibal added, “then Daddy will get to eat all of them.”

“No!” Abigail pushed herself up a little more, giving Hannibal a sleepy look of displeasure. “I help.”

“You want to help?”

“Yeah, want tatoes,” Abigail caught a yawn against Will’s chest and nuzzled there. “Like tatoes.”

“And maybe some broccoli too,” Will added with a smile. “Mashed potatoes, broccoli and the fish Daddy caught with Abby yesterday.”

“Big fish,” Abigail grinned, eyes finally opening to look at them. “And lil trees.”

“That’s right,” Will laughed, gently touching her cheek. “But you have to get up for that, love, no more naptime.”

“No more naptime,” Abigail agreed decisively and sat up, holding her hands out to Hannibal so he could lift her off of Will’s body and hold her against him.

“Maybe not so many potatoes,” he said. “You’re getting very big.”

“I’m get big from eating tatoes,” Abigail agreed. “Eat all the tatoes til I’m big like Daddy.”

“I think Daddy ate some other things to get so tall,” Hannibal said, carrying her out and down the stairs towards the kitchen. “Things that were leafy, and green.”

“Milk,” Will suggested, grabbing the pan he’d discarded earlier to clear out the remnants of his last attempts at dinner.

“Abby eating tatoes,” Abigail insisted stubbornly.

“Of course.”

Abigail had a little stool by the kitchen island, and Hannibal set her there to color while he and Will prepared the rest of the meal. When the potatoes were properly boiled, he set the bowl before Abigail, who squealed with excitement when he handed her the potato masher.

They ended up with more potatoes on the counter and the floor than in the bowl, but Hannibal had prepared for that eventuality by handing off some of the potatoes to Will instead. Between the three of them, they managed a decent portion. Abigail ate all of hers and then jammed her spoon right into Hannibal’s portion as well.

“Abigail,” Will chided gently, pulling her hand back. Abigail blinked big wide eyes up at them both, lower lip jutting out.

“Sooooo hungry,” she said, though she’d eaten every bite of broccoli and two servings of fish.

“You know that’s not polite,” Will added, tilting his head. They’d started slowly teaching her the kind of table manners both he and Hannibal agreed were necessary; there was no reason for her to know how to use all seventeen forks and knives at a banquet, but she knew which hand to hold each in and *usually* knew to ask for seconds politely.

They were still working on the usually.

“How do we ask Papa for things?” Will prompted her gently. Abigail’s bottom lip jutted out even further but when she turned to Hannibal again there was no sign of tension or oncoming tantrum.

“Daddy can have more tatoes pe-es?”

“Of course you may,” Hannibal replied, giving her a calculating look. “But there won’t be any room left in that tummy for dessert then.”

Abigail’s eyes widened and she turned to look over at Will, who offered an exaggerated shrug as though to say *your choice.*

“Kinda ‘sert?” She asked, turning back to Hannibal, eyes narrowed. Hannibal hummed, understanding the gravity of such a question, and gave Will an amused look.

“On his way home, Papa stopped to get us all a treat,” he said, drawing out the anticipation. “A lemon tart for Daddy, a chocolate one for Papa, and a custard one, with every fruit you can imagine, for Abby.”

Abigail made a sound, both hungry and delighted, and squirmed about in her seat. After a moment she plonked herself down properly, spoon held aloft as though she were reading to dig her way to the dessert if need be.

“I have ‘sert,” she decided with a nod.

She ate all of hers, of course, and then, using much better manners, managed to sweet talk Hannibal out of a few bites of his. She gave a bite of Will’s lemon tart a single hesitant lick and then dismissed it entirely.

By the time she’d been bathed and tucked into pajamas, she was yawning, rubbing at her eyes with a tiny fist. Will held her close, caught between both bedrooms.

“I almost wonder if we shouldn’t just drag her bed into our room,” he murmured. “But I guess we shouldn’t be encouraging her.”

“I don’t know any teenagers who willingly share a room with their parents, Hannibal pointed out. “She comes to us because she needs us, and I see no reason to dissuade her.”

Will shot him a grateful look. They moved the toddler bed to the foot of their own that night.

Abigail slept between them anyway.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

> *“Next week is your birthday, silly girl. Remember, Papa and Daddy talked to you about how old you were?”*
>
> *Abigail held up two fingers, which Will pretended to bite.*
>
> *“Your birthday means you’ll be a year older,” Will added, taking her little hand and folding her fingers down so only three were up. “You’ll be three!”*
>
> *“I be this many,” Abigail obediently agreed. Will kissed her forehead.*
>
> Some cute family things, a few clues for the future, and the boys finally get time for sex again.

Abigail blossomed, though her energy sometimes left her new parents weary.

She did not move on from crawling into their bed at night, and her little bed stayed pressed to the foot of it.

But she smiled more, and laughed louder, and grew bold in her displays of affection.

There were still quiet moments, and sad moments. Days when no amount of cajoling would lift her spirits, nights when she jerked away with a mournful little wail.

But most days were just that: days. Ordinary hours in ordinary lives.

Will was home more than Hannibal was, and so most of the day-to-day errands fell to him. “Do you know what next week is?” He asked Abigail, as he pushed a cart along the aisle of the upscale grocery store Hannibal had insisted on. Abigail sat in the child seat, kicking her little legs happily as she looked around for something to demand.

“Monnay.” Abigail replied. Will laughed.

“Well, okay, yes, there *is* a Monday next week. And every week. But that’s not what I meant.” Will ducked his head, pressing their foreheads together and making Abigail giggle. “Next week is your birthday, silly girl. Remember, Papa and Daddy talked to you about how old you were?”

Abigail held up two fingers, which Will pretended to bite.

“Your birthday means you’ll be a year older,” Will added, taking her little hand and folding her fingers down so only three were up. “You’ll be three!”

“I be this many,” Abigail obediently agreed. Will kissed her forehead.

“Papa is going to make a very special dinner,” Will continued, stopping to add some coffee to their cart, “and there’ll be presents and surprises for the birthday girl.”

“For me?”

“Yeah,” Will laughed. He was still astounded, months later, just how much he adored this little girl. Sure, he was exhausted, he’d cried about as often as Abigail did, he’d been covered in vomit and poop and thrown food, he’d been scratched in her frenzies, and hit, but… when she smiled, and reached out for a cuddle, and called him Daddy, and dozed against his chest… it was worth it. All of it.

“Kinda presents?”

“Well that would ruin the surprise, wouldn’t it?” Will reasoned. Abigail considered this very seriously as they continued down the aisle. Will was almost done, they usually did a big shop all together on days both he and Hannibal had off, and this was just to supplement the basics.

Will was just squinting at the ingredients list on the back of a soy milk carton -- they were trying to see if Abigail’s upset stomach was due to a dairy intolerance -- when someone bumped their cart into his.

“God, I’m sorry,” the man gave Will a helpless look. “Head’s not on the right way this morning I think.”

“It’s fine,” Will offered a plastic smile. “No worries.”

“You have a beautiful little girl,” the man added. Will looked over. There was nothing nefarious about the comment, it wasn’t said with ill intent or a sleazy tone, but Will had worked homicide and had seen enough at the Bureau that he couldn’t help the red flags that immediately flipped up.

“Thank you,” he said at length. The man looked at Abigail a moment more before giving Will another smile.

“You have a good day, now.”

Will watched him go, a furrow in his brow, until Abigail gave a little shriek of joy directly into his ear. When he turned, she was pointing a few feet down the aisle.

“Cheese,” she said, with such intensity that Will had to stifle a laugh.

“You want cheese?”

“Daddy like cheese.” This was said with a sly look, one which lost some of it’s slyness due to her complete inability to mask her intentions.

“Daddy does like cheese,” Will agreed.

Abigail didn’t have friends yet, though Will was beginning to realize he was going to have to conjure some up if he didn’t want to irrevocably damage her, or something. She didn’t go to daycare, and Will had eyed advertisements for parenting groups with the kind of healthy suspicion that naturally developed after thirty plus years of misanthropy.

A birthday party was, therefore, unnecessary. Instead, they planned all sorts of treats. It was a bit late in the year for the zoo, the November air cold and crisp, but it was still open. With a heavy jacket and a scarf that had to be rewrapped every ten minutes or so, thanks to her fiddling, the weather was entirely manageable. More importantly, it wasn’t nearly as crowded as it would have been in the dead of summer.

“K-oh!” Abigail said, pointing to the crows in their vast enclosure. Hannibal had been in the middle of reading aloud to her from the little info card next to the fence and looked up. The corvids were playful animals, and painfully clever. Will was wondering when he and Hannibal would start to get demands for more animals in their home, as though seven dogs weren’t enough. It was inevitable. Will had wanted an elephant when he was a child.

“Lots of crows,” Will agreed, adjusting her scarf again. They had the stroller, but she was sitting up against his hip and clinging to Will’s jacket. “Do you want to count the crows? Help Daddy count the crows.”

Abigail enthusiastically chanted the numbers along with Will, uncaring if she slipped up and they started over. Will kissed her cheek over and over until she was shrieking and giggling and trying to bat Will away. As soon as he pulled back, she leaned in to cuddle up against him.

They saw the polar bear in her enclosure, enjoying the weather now that it was finally what she was comfortable in. She walked about, prideful in her patrol, before diving into her deep pool and disappearing for a while. Will told Abigail about the polar bears, getting most of his information from the info card, and fielded as many questions as he was able.

“Why she white?”

“So she can blend in with the snow and no one can see her,” Hannibal explained.

“Big teef?”

“Very big teeth,” he agreed.

“Is cuddly?”

“Probably not,” Will laughed. “But she looks so soft, doesn’t she?”

“Soff,” Abigail agreed. “Like my dogs.”

“I doubt she’d enjoy being climbed on,” Hannibal said, giving Abigail a knowing look. All of the dogs were, by now, very used to her barreling over them like a tiny steamroller.

“I not climb on bears,” she informed him haughtily.

By the building that housed the bats, Will passed Abigail over to Hannibal, needing a break. She was still such a little thing, but she’d refused to be set down for well over an hour at this point.

The building was cool and dark.. Abigail made one, overdramatic shriek at the darkness, and then immediately forgot she’d decided to be afraid. She ordered Hannibal around, pointing imperiously from one glass pane to the next, while Will hung back with the stroller.

It was not so dark that he couldn’t make out his family, but as they drew closer to the exit, the spaces they left behind seemed more shadowy. When Will glanced back, he caught sight of another visitor, a tall man on his own, leaning in to look at an exhibit. Besides him, they had the entire building to themselves. Clearly, they’d chosen a good day to make the trip.

Outside, Abigail declared that she loved all the bats, and proceeded to make up a song about them, consisting only of the word “bats”, chanted over and over. Will stepped up close, so he and Hannibal were side by side again, and kissed his cheek.

“Break?” He asked, quietly enough for Abigail not to hear. Hannibal hummed the affirmative and turned his head to breathe against Will’s hair.

“Perhaps a treat before we go?” He suggested, and Will snorted, shaking his head.

“You spoil her.”

“I’m sure one hotdog won’t go amiss,” Hannibal replied, his smile warm, and Will rolled his eyes.

“It starts with hotdogs, and ends in the gift shop,” he warned.

He wasn’t wrong.

They had agreed to let Abigail choose something from the shop for her birthday, to add to the presents waiting for her at home, and diligently tidied up the toys Abigail happily tossed about in search of her gift. Will excused himself to use the restroom, and when he returned, Hannibal was looking over his shoulder at someone’s retreating back. When he turned to Will, he didn’t look at all perturbed, so Will shrugged it off.

“Have you found who you want to take home?”

“Dis,” Abigail said, showing him an armful of stuffed animals. Will sighed.

“Just one.”

“Why one?”

“Because there are more presents at home,” Hannibal reminded her. “And… a birthday cake.”

“Cake?!”

And food Hannibal would actually *eat* . Will still couldn’t believe he’d bought Abigail a hot dog from a *food stand* .

“Why don’t we find the one who’s the cuddliest?” Will suggested, crouching down before Abigail.

This, of course, meant hugging every single stuffed animal within reach, for several long seconds. Will had learned an entirely new kind of patience, being the father of a toddler determined to do everything “all myself.”

Eventually, Abigail settled on a long otter, and a polar bear as the cuddliest, and she looked up at Will and Hannibal with the widest eyes she could manage.

“One, two,” she said, counting them pointedly, as if hoping to impress them enough to win a reward.

“One,” Will tried again, already feeling his resolve caving.

Abigail turned her eyes on Hannibal. “Daddy Papa?” she said, having still not entirely grasped the concept of different names for different daddies.

They’d talked together a few times now about how they should parent Abigail going forward. It was one thing to allow her to grow and express herself, and quite another to spoil her rotten. Will had had very little growing up, and Hannibal had had a life of luxury until he was adopted by his uncle, and they wanted to give Abigail something in between.

“What did Daddy say?” Hannibal ask patiently, as though Will wasn’t right beside him. Abigail pouted.

“He say one.”

“So one it is.”

“But… but you say two?” she asked hopefully. Will had to hide his smile, he could barely resist her. Of the two of them, he was still the more permissive; terrified that he would do something to have her hate him, or fear him, and never trust him again. Hannibal, with his background and knowledge, was a little harder to sway.

“How about a compromise?” Hannibal offered, crouching down.

“Wha’s comp-ro-rise?” Abigail asked, still clinging to both her toys.

“It’s when we find a way to meet in the middle, partly what Daddy wants, and partly what Abby wants.” Abigail was watching Hannibal very seriously. For a toddler, she’d already mastered a look that suggested no one should mess with her. “How about we choose just one,” Hannibal continued. “To take home tonight. You can show them your room, and the other toys, and let them settle in. And next time we come, we’ll get the other. That way the first can help them when they’re new and nervous.”

Abigail still very much believed that her toys came to life behind her back, and the idea of someone having a friend to show them around in a place that was new and scary struck home. She sighed, far too deep for someone of her size, and considered the two in her hands. Then, reluctantly, she held out the bear for Hannibal to put away.

“I’m come back,” she promised the toy, stroking its back before hooking her little finger around a stuffed paw. “Promise.”

It was too much for Will. She was painfully adorable, even when she wasn’t trying to be, and it was hard for Will not to want to give her everything she asked for, something that had never been an option for him as a child.

“The presents at home,” he murmured to Hannibal, as Abigail led them towards the counter, “she doesn’t know how many there are. She won’t know if we add one more.”

Hannibal shot Will a look, fond and knowing. Will flushed, ducking his head.

“It was just a thought,” he mumbled.

Hannibal wrapped an arm around Will’s waist, pulling him in to press a kiss to his temple. “It was a wonderful thought,” he murmured back. “She *is* hard to resist, isn’t she?”

Will grinned. “Cause a distraction for me?”

“Of course.”

After they paid for the toy, they stopped just outside the gift shop. Potty training was still evading them, but that didn’t mean they didn’t try, and the car ride was a long one. Hannibal took Abigail into the family restroom with him, while Will ducked back into the gift shop.

When he returned to the rack of animals, though, the bear wasn’t there. Nor were there any similar bears. There had been a very small handful of other people in the gift shop, but not many. It was just terrible luck that one of them had also wanted a polar bear.

Will tried to tell himself that Abigail couldn’t be disappointed, since she didn’t know she’d been getting the bear, but he was sure he still looked glum when he met Hannibal and Abigail at the gate.

Hannibal had prepared everything for the birthday dinner the night before; the cake was two-tiered and beautifully decorated with cream roses and tiny meringues, three candles on the very top. When Hannibal brought it out, the lights dimmed and just the candles burning, Abigail looked absolutely enthralled. She joined in with the two of them singing happy birthday, and stood up on her chair to be able to reach the candles to blow them out.

“Now you keep that wish secret,” Will told her. “And it will absolutely come true.”

“Okay,” she said, resolved and happy.

After cake came presents. Beautiful new clothes for her and her dolls, a few more tiny toy dogs for the dollhouse -- Hannibal had found an artisanal toy company, of course -- books

about space and dinosaurs and fairytales. Another paper doll book that she immediately hugged to her chest. A ball, because she'd started to show interest in sports when they played on TV.

Then bathtime. Then several wild moments of sugar-induced mania as she tried to tie her birthday ribbons on to the dogs, without much success. That play, however, seemed to have knocked the last of her energy out of her, and she was asleep seemingly before her head hit the pillow in her tiny bed.

Will got the dogs settled for the night, and checked the house downstairs, picking up some wayward toys and scraps of wrapping paper. When he climbed the stairs, he was met by Hannibal, who pressed a finger to his lips before Will could say a word. He guided Will back downstairs on silent socked feet and as soon as they were in the living room, he kissed him.

Deep and hungry and hot, hands cupping Will's face as Will groaned and wrapped his own arms beneath Hannibal's to hold onto his shoulders.

One stereotype about parenting had turned out to be all too true: there was simply no time for each other, with a little one under foot. A few stolen moments, here or there, and of course Will often sat with his shoulder pressed to Hannibal's while they watched their daughter play.

But typically, they were worn out when Abigail was, and they crashed not long after she did, woken only by little hands crawling over them to settle in between.

Will hadn't realized he was hungry until the feast was laid out before him. He clung to Hannibal, allowing himself to be guided backwards across the room.

"Think she'll stay asleep long enough," He whispered against Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal slid a broad hand down Will's back to cup his ass.

"If we're very quiet."

Will snorted. He was never quiet, and Hannibal knew it. But if he wanted to get laid at all in the next fifteen or so years, he was going to have to try.

Hannibal had thought of everything. He'd tucked lube into the little drawer in one of the end tables, and spread a blanket out over the couch to protect the fabric. Now he laid Will out over that same blacket, dextrous fingers working through the buttons of his shirt as his lips darkened a bruise over Will's collarbone.

"Fuck," he sighed, his own hands blindly working to get Hannibal bare as well. It was clumsy and awkward, and both were stifling laughter by the time their clothes were off; pants had gotten stuck on feet, shirts had caught awkwardly and tangled… it was perfect. It felt like they were teenagers trying to get away with something naughty so their parents didn't hear. It added to the thrill of it all, and Will felt giddy.

"Turn over," Hannibal told him, kisses smearing against Will's cheek. Will shook his head.

“Wanna see you.”

“You will,” Hannibal said, “just want to get you ready.”

Will groaned, stifling the sound against his wrist, before obeying. *Getting ready* was easily done with lube, *this* was the thing that undid Will every time Hannibal did it. Hannibal’s tongue was talented enough that Will was panting into the cushions within minutes, clutching them with white knuckles as he tried to keep himself quiet, biting the brocade covers as he moaned so the sound didn’t carry upstairs and wake their daughter.

Hannibal took his time, slipping a hand between Will’s legs to tease his cock as well, bringing him closer and closer to orgasm until Will was shaking, muscles quivering in anticipation.

“Hannibal--” Will’s voice was pulled tight, high, desperate, and he came with Hannibal’s name on his lips like a mantra, like a whimpered little plea. “Fuck, oh *fuck,* you’re good at that,”

Hannibal laughed, a purring and warm thing, and kissed Will’s tailbone. “I do what I can.”

Will snorted, rolling over onto his back with a pleased sound. “Yeah you do. Next time I’ll catch you and do it first.” he reached out to Hannibal and grinned when he leaned in to nuzzle against him.

They fit together so easily every time. Will arched his back, gasping as Hannibal slid into him. Hannibal covered him, chest to chest, legs intertwined, every inch of them touching. All Will could see, could feel, was Hannibal.

Hannibal slid one hand up Will’s arm, linking their fingers together and pinning Will’s hand beside his head. A moan spilled from Will’s lips, and Hannibal’s other hand found his mouth instead, sealing over it as Hannibal gave a particularly rough thrust.

Like this, Will still had to temper himself, but he could make a little bit of noise without concern, every sound stifled into Hannibal’s hand. Hannibal held him down, held him close. Will was the type to close his eyes whenever pleasure got to be too much, but Hannibal…

Hannibal never stopped looking at Will. He was always looking at Will, in bed and out, as if Will was something beautiful, fascinating. He looked at him now, and the intensity of his gaze had Will’s cock leaking against his belly, as if he hadn’t *just* come.

Hannibal made Will feel like a teenager, vibrant and energetic, happy in the sort of carefree way Will had long thought lost to him. Like this, Will couldn’t profess his love, but he pressed a kiss to Hannibal’s palm and watched his eyes darken.

Will squeezed their joined hands and Hannibal squeezed back, before pulling his hand from Will’s mouth and kissing him instead.

To say they made love wouldn’t be accurate; the way Hannibal and Will joined was more often than not a violent coming together. That hardly made it any less intimate, any less

loving, any less doting. Hannibal claimed Will as though it was their first time together, every time, and Will felt as though he was lighting up from within.

He bit into their kiss, tugged Hannibal's bottom lip, tucked his face up against Hannibal's as he whimpered his pleasure into his ear. He might not be able to come again so quickly -- it had been a long time since they'd had the time to push each other that way -- but he was on the precipice, and perhaps that was even better.

"Come on," he breathed, tensing around Hannibal, wrapping a leg over him to press him even closer. "Let me make you come,"

Hannibal cursed, a whispered thing against Will's cheek, and thrust harder, finding his pleasure in Will within moments, before collapsing heavy and hot against him.

Will recovered first, drawing his knees up to support Hannibal against him, hands wandering over Hannibal's sweaty back, down to his ass where Will squeezed gently and grinned when Hannibal grunted in response. He continued to pet over him, allowing Hannibal to recover in his own time, smiling sleepily at him when Hannibal finally looked up again, his hair a dishevelled mess over his eyes.

"Hiya stranger," Will whispered. Hannibal blinked languidly at him.

"Hi yourself," he murmured, before leaning in to kiss Will again. This time it was slow, exploratory, gentle. It was enough to make Will shiver, to have him fight against sleep, wanting to stay with the moment.

In the end, it was the desperate need to clean up that had them separating. Will giggled as he stumbled from the couch, gathering clothes from the floor uncaring for whose they were, as Hannibal picked up the blanket from the couch and adjusted the pillows. Will caught his arm at the stairs.

"I feel like a goddamn teenager," he said nose wrinkling in pleasure. Hannibal smiled back, cheeks still warm and eyes still glazed from their encounter.

"Good," he replied, kissing Will's cheek. "We need to keep that stamina up. Won't survive without it with a toddler in the house."

"We'll have to get creative," Will said, "in order to find time to get in more practice." Hannibal looked absolutely smitten when he leaned closer and nuzzled against him.

"With an imagination like yours," he murmured, "I'm certain we'll find ways."

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

> *“For certain people, a label is a safety,” Hannibal countered. “They feel part of a collective, where they once felt alone and adrift. Certain patients of mine have found comfort in a diagnosis, for instance. Understanding one’s symptoms and suddenly having a name to put to them allows one to have a goal in mind, a way forward.”*
>
> *“I’ve been called all sorts of things,” Marcus replied. “I’ve never found them to be fitting.”*

Chapter Notes

> Marcus is writing himself as a mix of Mason and Franklyn, oops!

“Lately I’ve been considering children,” Marcus said, midway through their weekly session.

Hannibal had been only half listening. Over the years, he’d perfected the perfect amount of engagement: just enough that his notes were complete and his patients felt cared for, not so much that Hannibal was out of his mind with boredom.

Marcus’s words, however, drew Hannibal’s full attention.

“Your last relationship ended just before our first session, correct?” Hannibal asked, though of course he knew the answer.

Marcus leaned back in his chair, legs crossed at the knee. He’d dressed better this session. He’d gone for slacks and a button-down instead, more expensive than the last suit he’d worn, but ill-fitting. “It did,” he agreed, “But I’ve moved on. I’ve found someone I want to share my life with.”

Hannibal hummed thoughtfully, double-checking the dates on his notes. “You’ve had problems with intensity before, Marcus. It’s only been a few months, and you haven’t mentioned a partner to me until now. Do you remember what we discussed in regards to looking at your intentions from an outsider’s perspective?”

“Haven’t you ever felt that spark, doctor?” Marcus asked instead, as usual ignoring Hannibal’s comments and guidance towards actually relevant therapeutic work. “When you

just *know* that that person is the one? That he will fulfil you and complete you as no other can?"

Hannibal flicked his eyes up to his patient again. Marcus was watching him with a somewhat satisfied look, as though he'd planned on shocking Hannibal and had succeeded. Hannibal wasn't shocked, there were few things in this life that still shocked him, but he was a little take aback.

"He?" he clarified. Marcus' grin was almost malicious.

"Yes."

"It isn't unheard of, of course, for sexuality and preferences to change later in one's life, but you've never made mention of that before." Hannibal pointed out carefully. Marcus shrugged, folding his fingers over the knee crossed over his leg and rocking back a little in his seat.

"I've never really found a label to fit me. And isn't it all a bit pretentious, doctor, *labelling* each other like products at a store?"

"For certain people, a label is a safety," Hannibal countered. "They feel part of a collective, where they once felt alone and adrift. Certain patients of mine have found comfort in a diagnosis, for instance. Understanding one's symptoms and suddenly having a name to put to them allows one to have a goal in mind, a way forward."

"I've been called all sorts of things," Marcus replied. "I've never found them to be fitting."

Hannibal chewed the inside of his lip and made a note on his page. He wouldn't rise to the bait. In his own mind he'd diagnosed Marcus a long time ago: a narcissist, obsessive, sociopathic. None of which could be adjusted with medication. What Marcus needed was a long stay in a ward where he could be properly monitored. But he was one of the last remaining *interesting* clients Hannibal had, and he was wont to keep him around a little longer.

"Children?" he prompted instead.

"Are the future," Marcus replied glibly. "Little bundles of joy. People have them for all sorts of reasons, really. Legacy. Therapy. People have some absolutely terrible reasons for reproducing, and yet the world keeps turning."

Marcus, Hannibal knew by now, spoke largely to listen to the sound of his own voice. If Hannibal prodded him, tried to pry answers free, he would talk in circles just to drag things out.

If Hannibal waited, however, face placid, body language unassuming, Marcus would tire himself out and get to the point.

"I think I'd be an excellent father," Marcus decided. "I'd be a provider. I'd make sure my family had everything they needed."

Hannibal flipped through his notebook to find the relevant entry. “You were fired last month,” Hannibal reminded him. “And your unemployment will run out soon. Your father is footing the bill for our sessions.”

A muscle in Marcus’s jaw twitched, but he waved dismissively, as if Hannibal’s expressed concerns were nothing more than an irritating gnat. “Technicalities,” he said. “I’ve got everything planned out. A whole new career path, a little house in the countryside. We have a cottage we used as a vacation home, dad said I could use that. Gets me out of his hair, he just got remarried, you know.”

Hannibal didn’t know, nor did he care. Outwardly, he just nodded. “Is this desire for children a way to show your father that you could do a better job parenting than he did?”

“And here I thought you were above such things, Doctor Lecter,” Marcus sighed, shaking his head. Hannibal had to hold back a smile. The act was… rather pathetic. When he had first met Marcus, the man had drawled his words, he’d dressed poorly and didn’t wash his hair, he’d referred to life as a river and himself as a boat floating upon it. Now, he spoke as though he were a colleague, lamenting the archaic use of Freudian psychiatry in modern sessions.

“Then tell me,” Hannibal said.

“A provider is not merely fiscal,” Marcus replied, almost spitting the word. “There is an intimacy, a bond that grows from closeness. Between partners, between parents and children. I have that to offer. That closeness. That *bond,* doctor, do you understand?”

Marcus had sat forward, eyes burning into Hannibal’s own with an accusation that Hannibal couldn’t quite place, but it had hit something within him that seemed to vibrate, like a string plucked, a note held.

“You’re lonely,” Hannibal told him quietly. Marcus flinched, sitting back in his seat. They were silent for a time, just the clock ticking away on the wall, cutting down minute by minute the time they had to spend together. He was Hannibal’s last patient of the day. Will had promised to make stew for dinner. Hannibal was already looking forward to finding the badly chopped carrots and celery in his bowl, proof of Abigail’s attempts to help make the meal.

“You know,” Marcus murmured, breaking the silence. “For the first time in a long time, I don’t think I am.”

“I not do it.”

Will surveyed the scene he’d walked in on, adjusting his jacket, patting his pockets for his keys.

Abigail stood by the door, Hannibal kneeling in front of her, tiny sneakers in hand. Abigail had stripped down to her pull up and socks, the rest of her clothes in a tiny pile when she’d been fully dressed just two minutes earlier. Will met Hannibal’s gaze, one eyebrow raised.

“I not do it!” Abigail said louder, fixing her stern glare on Will instead.

“What aren’t we doing?” Will asked, joining Hannibal on the floor. Hannibal grimaced.

“I made the mistake of mentioning where we were going *before* the ice cream shop,” Hannibal admitted, and Will had to bite back a laugh. It was always fascinating to watch Hannibal fall into basic parenting missteps, a crack in the facade of perfection he’d built around him.

“Aren’t you supposed to be the psychological expert?”

“Not when it comes to pediatrics,” Hannibal replied stiffly. Will sighed fondly, reaching out to take Abigail’s little hand.

“Sweetheart, you have to go to the doctor.”

“I *not do it!”* Abigail shrieked.

“Why not?” Will asked, tone soft, inviting. “Don’t you want to go for ice cream?”

“You *leave me there* ,” Abigail growled, tears welling up in her eyes.

Will exchanged looks with his husband and sat more comfortably on the floor. This would take longer than a simple negotiation. They had an appointment to keep, but from several months’ worth of practice, they had learned to get ready to go at least an hour before they actually had to be somewhere, to make time for things like this.

“Has Daddy ever broken a promise?” Will asked her. Abigail sniffed and shook her head, before bringing her little hand up to rub her eyes as tears started to slip silently out of them and down her cheeks. “Has Papa?” she shook her head again, more violently this time, and Hannibal reached out to take her little hand in his. She tried to tug it away, but Hannibal held firm.

“We’ll be with you the entire time,” he promised, stroking his thumb over her tiny knuckles. “Both Daddy and I. We will all go to the doctor together.”

“But then you *leave,”* she whined. “We go in then you leave and Abby *stay!* Alone!”

“No, baby girl,” Will reached out to wipe her tears with a knuckle. “No, nothing like that. Both Papa and I will come in with you, and hold your hand, and then we will all go to get ice cream together afterwards.”

“Noooo,” she shook her head and started to cry harder. “No you *leave,* you leave an’ I never see Fluff or Win-son or dollies again!”

“Why do you think that, sweetheart?” Hannibal asked.

“Coz tha’s how Mama left!”

Will sighed, long and low, and reached out to take the little girl into his lap for a cuddle. She kept crying, helpless, childish sobs, and wiped them on Will’s shirt. He didn’t care. He just

held her, as Hannibal stroked her hair and down her little trembling back. Moments later, her sobs became sniffles, then wet breaths.

She hadn't ever mentioned her mother before. Nor her father, to them. Of course she remembered them, in her own childish way, she'd spent two years with them before…

Before.

"Baby girl," Will whispered, letting her sit back so she could see them both. He took her little finger and curled it around his own. "I promise you, we're not going anywhere without you. Not now, not ever."

Abigail made a mournful little sound, a quivering wail that stifled itself in Will's shirt and died painfully not long after. Will's heart broke anew, as it did so often with this little girl.

He knew they'd only had her for a few months. There were years ahead of them, decades, and in that time, Abigail would grow and heal. But it seemed sometimes as though certain traumas would linger forever, never improving, always in the foreground.

"I have you," Will whispered, unable to do anything else. "Daddy has you. We're going to be right there, every *second* . Neither of us is going to leave your sight, sweetheart."

Little fists clenched in Will's shirt, wrinkling the fabric. After a few more moments of shaking, watery breaths, Abigail pulled back.

"Two scoops," She mumbled, wiping her face with a fist and smearing grime across her cheeks. Will winced, and accepted the baby wipe Hannibal procured for him.

"What was that, Abby?" Hannibal asked.

"Want *two* scoops of ice cream," Abigail said, in a voice that would clearly accept no arguments.

Will laughed, relieved and delighted both, and Hannibal brought a tissue up to her face to help her blow her nose.

"Two scoops," he promised. "With cream on top."

"Cream on top," Abigail agreed with a decisive nod.

They got her dressed again, with Abigail reciting every piece of clothing as they put it on her. She sat on Hannial's knee as he put her little sneakers on, and held his hand when he stood to lead them both out towards the car.

The appointment wasn't for anything serious; just a general check up. The doctor Hannibal had found was an old colleague of his, and Will had felt comfortable with him from the moment they'd met. He was good with Abigail, spoke to her like they did, as though she were an adult who just happened to not be able to reach the counter.

He checked her ears, her mouth and nose, shone a light in her eyes, and took her temperature. All the while, Will and Hannibal were there, answering questions Abigail didn't know the answer to, or when she was too distracted to hear them asked. Whenever she reached out, one of them was there to stroke her hair or take her hand. Always.

On the way to the ice cream shop, Abigail bounced in her car seat, kicking her legs joyfully. The doctor had given her a sticker that she wore proudly on her hand as a sign of her bravery.

Will, personally, was exhausted. It wore him out just to watch Abigail panic, and it wasn't even *his* trauma. He was rejuvenated, though, by her joyful shriek as she tumbled free of the Bentley, stumbling as fast as her little legs would carry her towards the ice cream shop.

They settled in to a little corner booth, Abigail between Will and the wall, digging into her strawberry scoops with a gusto that made Will slightly nauseous to behold.

In the early winter months, the shop was nearly empty. There was one other small family across the aisle from them, and a man in a suit sipping a chocolate milkshake at the counter. Will knew Hannibal would have preferred to make ice cream at home, but Will liked the cozy little shop, and Abigail was more inclined to feel like she was getting a special reward if they went out to get it.

"Hanukkah is coming closer," Will mused quietly. Hannibal paused in his dainty bites of plain vanilla bean ice cream, glancing at Abigail. Both of them were unsure of exactly how much she remembered of the holiday, if she was old enough to have any expectations at all beyond knowing it was a word she recognized.

"Hammikah!" Abigail chirped, without looking up from the pink mess she was making of her styrofoam dish.

"That's right," Hannibal said encouragingly. "What's your favorite thing about Hanukkah?"

"Present." Abigail chirped, to no one's surprise. If she was going to remember anything at all, whether it be true memory or just a recollection of some conversation her parents might have had, it would of course be gifts.

"I think we can manage presents," Will said with a laugh. "As if you need any more after your birthday. What else?"

Abigail considered this question very seriously, her little brow furrowed. "Camdles?" she finally said, uncertain.

"We're going to need to do some reading," Hannibal mused, and Will snorted, shaking his head in agreement. He knew there were kids' books out there that explained religious holidays of all sorts; hell, the kids' books would probably give them a better idea of what Hanukkah was than any encyclopedic one could.

"Can has some?" Abigail interrupted their brief silence, eyes wide as she stared at Hannibal and held her spoon at the ready. Hannibal raised an eyebrow and gave Will a look. Will shrugged helplessly.

“How do we ask nicely?” Hannibal prompted. Abigail’s face split in a grin.

“Can has some peez?”

“You may,” Hannibal allowed, moving his bowl a little closer to her so she didn’t make a mess of the tabletop.

“You want?” she offered her own bowl back, some dregs of her ice cream melted on the bottom. The thought was accepted, however, and Hannibal dutifully dipped his spoon into it.

“I’ll be right back,” Will got up and set a hand to Hannibal’s shoulder as he passed him, on his way to the bathroom. Hannibal turned to look after him and… didn’t turn back. Abigail took the opportunity to help herself to another spoonful of his ice cream.

“Daddy?” Abigail asked, her voice rising when Hannibal didn’t immediately respond. “Daddy-Papa, you kay?”

“Yes, sweetheart,” Hannibal replied, though he was still looking, still distracted. “Yes, I’m fine.”

“Why you looking?”

Hannibal turned back and offered a smile. “Just waiting for Daddy to get back.”

“He come back,” Abigail confirmed, gesturing with her chin, and Hannibal turned to look over his shoulder again. Will was coming back, checking something on his phone and adjusting his glasses, but the man at the counter was gone.

“That’s right,” Hannibal said, frowning at the counter. “Daddy always comes back.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

> *She greeted him at the top of the stairs, blue eyes wide and bright and eager. "You bringed!"*
>
> *"Of course I did," Hannibal said, glancing down at Buster. "Would Papa ever let you down?"*
>
> And now... for something *somewhat* different.

By day three, Hannibal had gotten the hang of it.

He'd never been religious, nor was he particularly opposed to it. He'd just learned long ago that if a desperate child's prayers were left unheard, then the entity listening had no trust from him.

He lit the middle candle, then another, and another, until four candles stood lit -- not including the *shamash* -- and a warm glow enveloped their *menorah.*

The lead up to Hanukkah had been a mad dash by both Hannibal and Will to learn as much as they could so they could give Abby the best experience possible, the closest -- they hoped -- to the ones she remembered.

The first day, Will had fumbled through some prayers, cheeks burning bright with embarrassment. The translation of their meaning was beneath the italic phonetic transcript of he Hebrew above that, but Will still felt like he had no idea what he was doing.

Later, Abigail confessed that she'd never sat through "the long Daddy jumble" at "Hammika" before and she wasn't a big fan. Will, to the chagrin of both of them, had not tried the prayers the next day.

Hannibal, however, lost himself in the joys of discovering just what was served on the table at such a celebration. It was so, so rare that he made what Will called "human food", meaning food that didn't look like it belonged on the cover of a magazine, that he found the novelty very enjoyable.

Latkes, sufganiyot, bimuelos, cassola … everything was thoroughly enjoyed by his husband and daughter. Abigail, to no one's surprise, asked if they could have this every day. Hannibal, to Will's surprise, didn't immediately make a face.

"Perhaps," he informed her, "on occasion."

“Occasions,” Abby agreed, shoving another little donut into her mouth.

Abigail liked the candles, the soft glow and flicker of the light, and liked even more when her daddies carefully guided her to do it herself, cradling her little hands in theirs as they lit a very long match.

Then, there were meant to be stories about the importance of the holiday. Will had printed a few out, and bought some picture books, but though Abigail seemed to like them, they didn’t hold her attention, not when she knew what came *after* stories.

“Present,” she declared on the fourth night, crawling into Will’s lap directly atop the book he’d been reading from.

“Demanding,” Will chided half-heartedly; he was self-conscious about his story-voice to begin with, and he wasn’t quite sure how to impress the importance of the holiday on a three-year old with jelly around her lips. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped her mouth carefully, flicking the corner of it against her cheek after to make her giggle.

“Present please,” Abigail amended. Will kissed her forehead.

“Go get Papa from the kitchen,” he said. Abigail gave him a look. Will laughed. She’d definitely picked that expression up from Hannibal. *“Please,”* he added, to Abby’s delight. She jumped from his lap and toddled off towards the kitchen, where she loudly told her “Daddy-Papa” that Will wanted to talk to him.

Hannibal’s reply was somewhat of a mumbled thing that Will didn’t bother to listen to. He slipped the present he’d been hiding under the couch cushions from its place and closed the book he was holding. He listened to Hannibal’s footsteps, to his voice growing a little more coherent the closer he came.

There were still days where Will looked at his life and wondered how he ever got so lucky. He’d known he was going to be a father this year, hell or high water, and he’d spent a lot of time leading up to that preparing on his own, but to get Hannibal as well, and Hannibal wanting to raise a child together…

“How you get that?” Abigail asked, gently touching the present in Will’s hands. Will opened his eyes and winked at her.

“Magic.”

He handed the gift over to her as Hannibal sat next to him on the couch and Abigail plopped herself on the floor to tear the present open. It was a little coloring book filled with her favourite cartoon characters. Abby immediately shrieked, delighted, and hugged it, before pushing herself to stand up and go to her bedroom where the pencils were, independent and headstrong.

“See?” Will murmured, when Hannibal rested his head against his shoulder. “Little gifts.”

“I still don’t see why you wouldn’t let me buy her the coloring annual,” Hannibal replied softly.

“It was bigger than my head,” Will muttered back. “She wouldn’t even be able to lift it.”

“She’s a sturdy little thing,” Hannibal insisted, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips. Will rolled his eyes good-naturedly.

“We said we were going to do this right,” Will reminded him. “We weren’t going to turn it into Second Christmas. We were going to actually teach her about her culture and not make it all about the presents.”

“You’re right,” Hannibal agreed, “as you so often are. I suppose it’s hard not to spoil her, with her being the only one.”

Will turned his head so sharply that he thought he heard his neck crack. Hannibal looked back at him, his eyes slightly widened, his mouth parted around a sound that didn’t come.

They hadn’t discussed it, not ever. Will was well aware they had Abigail together only because of timing, that she had ultimately been his idea and his want, and that he would have adopted her with or without Hannibal’s support. But now they had this, their family together. Ties of affection and shared experience, and it had all happened so quickly that Will sometimes felt a little breathless with it, sometimes worried the rug was about to be torn out from under him.

“Hannibal,” Will whispered. “Did you… Do you want-”

“DADDY!” Abigail yelled from the top of the stairs, “Come help!”

Will tore himself from Hannibal’s gaze and stood, grasping Hannibal’s hand on his way past as though to say *I want to talk about this, we’ll talk about this.* Then he took the stairs two at a time and scooped up their little girl at the top of the stairs, blowing a raspberry against her belly.

Hannibal sat as Will had left him, his own mind reeling with the words that had left his lips. He wasn’t sure what had prompted the statement, he wasn’t sure why both he and Will had taken it to mean exactly the same thing: “with her being the only one, *for now.”*

He’d never wanted a big family. In fact, he’d never considered that he’d even want a small one. Hannibal had long ago learned to be self-sufficient, his lifestyle not only called for it but suited him just fine. And then Will had blown into his life like some whirlwind of a storm and had swept Hannibal along for the ride. Into marriage, into a family, into raising a toddler.

He listened to the quiet sounds of Will and Abby upstairs, her chattering away loudly and Will agreeing with only partially exaggerated excitement.

Hannibal hadn’t hunted as often since she’d come into their lives, as much because he was simply unable, as because he hadn’t… ached to. Not as much. He left them both with the

desire to fill their fridge with a hard-won meal, rather than to spend aching hours presenting a tableaux to the FBI.

Who had he become?

“Daddy-Papa!”

He blinked, looking up. Abigail was at the top of the stairs again, looking stern. She pointed to her feet.

“Come draw!” she demanded, grinning as soon as Hannibal pushed himself to stand. “Daddy and fluff already here! Bring lil dog?”

Buster. She wanted Hannibal to bring up Buster. As though he wouldn’t follow at Hannibal’s feet like a shadow everywhere he went.

“I’m coming,” Hannibal said, shaking his head as if to clear the jumble of thoughts away. “Papa will be right there.”

When he patted his thigh, Buster came to heel, as accustomed to and fond of Hannibal as the two humans upstairs. This had been… Not an experiment, not as such, but a project, certainly. Hannibal had expected he would eventually grow bored, and either keep them around for appearances with far less mental energy spent, or quietly leave and pay child support if he thought he could do so without too much undue attention from the high society friends he surrounded himself with.

Used to surround himself with. There hadn’t been quite as much time for the opera or dinner parties lately, though he was sure Abigail would love a chance to dress up and eat from a grown-up plate.

He wasn’t bored. Not yet, and certainly there hadn’t been much time for the shine to wear off, but even so… Nothing seemed any less brilliant than it had so many months ago. Will still called to him, his intelligence and wit breathtaking. Abigail still captivated every spare moment of Hannibal’s attention, even if his previous plans for her had fallen by the wayside in favor of spurring her on in her typical development.

She greeted him at the top of the stairs, blue eyes wide and bright and eager. “You bringed!”

“Of course I did,” Hannibal said, glancing down at Buster. “Would Papa ever let you down?”

Abigail shook her head, expression just as somber as any Will or Hannibal had worn around her. Then she held her hand up to him, pinkie raised -- their sign for an unbroken promise. Hannibal hooked his finger with hers and let her lead him to the playroom.

Hannibal hated that he had a standing appointment this late in the day. Will had texted him from the store a few hours earlier, several messages outlining the amusing story of the way the store clerk had looked at him as she’d rung up his items; a series of expensive herbs and oils followed by a bulk pack of pull-ups and some dog treats.

She thinks we have a much more varied sex life than we actually do. Will concluded, to Hannibal's great delight. They hadn't had time to enjoy any sort of sex life with Hanukkah going on, and Hannibal was already missing the heat of Will's breath against his throat as he held him close. He reread the messages and sent another to Will, apropos of nothing, telling him he missed him.

He set his phone down deliberately and stood, before he could read Will's reply, buttoning his jacket. He had one more appointment before he could leave.

Marcus was reclining in one of the waiting room chairs with a wide smile on his face, and Hannibal's steps stuttered. Marcus rarely smiled. And he rarely smiled with such genuine mirth. It was almost unsettling. Almost.

"Marcus," he said, offering a faint smile of his own. "Come through, please."

Marcus moved with a graceful fluidity he had not had when Hannibal had met him all those months ago. He settled into his chair, posture straightened. "I was thinking about moving on from therapy," he declared.

Hannibal took a seat, picking up the notebook he'd reserved for Marcus. "What does your father have to say on the matter?"

"I wouldn't know," Marcus said with an easy shrug. "Didn't ask."

"I believe your sessions with me were a condition of your continued residence in his house, were they not?"

"He *did* give me the cabin," Marcus reminded him.

"With no conditions? That seems unlike your father."

Marcus bared his teeth, the first crack in his pleased veneer. He and his father had been at odds for so many years, Hannibal was amazed they hadn't assaulted each other yet.

"Maybe he realized I'm not a child anymore," Marcus said. "I have a family of my own to care for now."

Or perhaps, as was more likely, he was merely happy to have Marcus out of the house, no matter what need be sacrificed. "Ah, yes, your partner. How long have you been seeing them?"

"Long enough," Marcus replied blithely. "Though, if I'm honest, it feels as though we met only hours ago."

Not *just yesterday,* Hannibal noted. Marcus was notorious for cliched turns of phrase, and this stood out a little. Hannibal underlined it carefully in his notes.

"It's promising that you both still feel so passionately about each other," Hannibal said gently, giving Marcus a look from behind his notebook. "Such connections are rare and hard to find."

“I suppose some of us are just lucky,” Marcus shrugged. Then he sat forward, elbows on his knees and fingers loosely entwined, similar to how Hannibal would sit on occasion, body open and welcoming of admissions and confessions.

“You know, I should thank you, Dr. Lecter,” he murmured. “You’ve taught me a lot about myself in the short time we’ve been seeing each other. Few people can do that, you know. *Get through,* like that. I appreciate it.”

Hannibal swallowed imperceptibly and tilted his head. “It’s always encouraging when therapy is effective.”

“No, not the therapy. Fuck the therapy,” Marcus barked out a laugh and shook his head. “No, *you.* You’ve taught me a lot about… a lot of things. About the things that matter, and how hard to fight for them.”

“What sorts of things, Marcus?”

“Nah,” Marcus sat back, then, and drew a hand through his hair. “No, we’re not going to do that. I think I’ll go, actually, won’t waste your time with another session since I’m quitting it outright. Just felt wrong to not show up, you know, so I wanted to tell you in person.”

Hannibal watched him stand and noted the time in his book for later. He himself didn’t stand just yet, but he did set his notes aside.

“That’s thoughtful of you,” he said quietly. Marcus beamed, as though that were the highest praise. “I will have to get in touch with your father by proxy of your lawyer, you understand, and inform them of your decision.”

“Do what you need,” Marcus told him. “I have better things to think about. You enjoy your evening, Dr. Lecter. If you hurry you might be able to get home before dinner. That’ll be nice for your husband, huh?”

Hannibal had spent too long prying open people’s skulls to peek at their insides to not know when he was being prodded at. The only thing he couldn’t figure out was *why.*

Marcus had never been his biggest fan, and the sentiment was returned thoroughly, but he had never before been actively antagonistic. Never had Hannibal felt as though he was being attacked.

“Should you need me,” Hannibal said smoothly, for lesser men than Marcus had tried to intimidate him before, and all had failed, “my door is always open.”

Perhaps there was a prank involved, or some sort of revenge. A scathing review online of Hannibal’s practices; every psychiatrist received at least one, and Hannibal was no exception. As Marcus left, all Hannibal could be certain of was that he would be very glad to never have him darken his door again.

The chance to get home a little earlier meant that Hannibal had more time to focus on his family, the two people in the world he found the most tolerable. More than tolerable.

Hannibal took advantage of the extra minutes to stop by the patisserie he preferred and pick up a treat for after dinner, something rich and heavy that Abigail would smear all over her face while Will laughed. Then he stopped somewhere else.

It was the last night of Hanukkah, and he and Will had stuck to traditions to the letter. Hanukkah, he knew, was not the holiest of days in the Jewish calendar. It was not the equivalent to Christmas most people thought it was. And yet, Hannibal had felt the growing urge to bring home a surprise, to make Abigail's first holiday season with them one that left a lasting impression on her. He set the box on the floor of the passenger side, where he could keep an eye on it as he drove.

Will would chide him for the overkill, Hannibal was certain, but he was equally certain of the way Will's face would light up and his features would soften when he saw the gift, and Hannibal could not help his desire.

By the time he got home, his discomfort from the session had faded somewhat. He felt a smile warm his face as he turned off the engine and took up the heavy box from the passenger seat.

The house was dark when he unlocked the door, and no one answered when he called. Perhaps Will had needed to run out and get something again -- unlike Hannibal he never made grocery lists and usually flew by the seat of his pants when it came to restocking their kitchen -- and he never left Abigail alone.

So Hannibal set the box down and carefully opened it, allowing the tiny white cloud of fur to bound out of it and start immediately sniffing about. He'd considered getting something less fluffy, but knew that Abigail would appreciate the sheer poofiness of her gift.

The little spitz was almost four months old, according to her book, and had been the first pup to stand up on her back legs when Hannibal had come in to look around. She'd chosen him.

A few moments of the little dog exploring the room were enough for Hannibal to start to feel a little uneasy. By now, the other dogs would have swarmed him in greeting, licking his hands and his face, sniffing his pockets and trying to sneak treats he might have hidden in there. Buster, at the very least would have come close to assert his dominance over the newcomer, and Winston would be close behind to keep him in check.

Yet none of them were there. He couldn't even hear them in the house.

Hannibal stood, lips pressing together, and whistled, short and sharp. Then he listened. He closed his eyes, and took deep breaths and *listened.*

There. The far end of the house, one of the less-used rooms because aside from Hannibal no one really practiced music just yet. He made his way there, following the scratching against the door, the soft whines behind it, until he freed the pack of ragtag animals who immediately dashed past him to the front of the house.

Buster wasn't among them.

Hannibal could see him, sitting, or lying, a little deeper in the room, but he hadn't come up to him as he normally would have. So Hannibal moved towards him instead. Slow steps, even ones, until he knelt next to the little creature that was trembling and bleeding on the floor.

He was alive, but only just. Hannibal had time to rush him to the vet, to save him.

So he did. He did it with blind determination and stoic concentration. Because if he thought about everything else, about anything else; the tipped over sippy cup in the kitchen, the vegetables left partially chopped on the counter, the wrong knife next to them, as though Will had grabbed it in a fit of panic to use instead… if he thought about that, he would see red.

Will wasn't at the store, picking up forgotten things.

Someone had taken his family.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Will needed facts. He needed to concentrate on something tangible so he could remain calm and light with Abigail when she woke. The last thing he wanted was to wake her, to have her panic, to have her think that they were in danger.

So here were the facts:

Chapter Notes

Warnings for this chapter: violence (towards Will only, Abigail isn't and won't be harmed at all in this story), sexual assault, nonconsensual drugging.

Abigail hadn’t woken yet, and only her soft little murmurs eased the tight knot in Will’s belly. She had shifted from a drug induced sleep to a more natural one in the hours they’d been in the car, and now, tucked up against Will in a large bed in the back room of a hunting cabin, she was peaceful.

Will’s own coordination had not entirely returned to him. His limbs still felt heavy, and he was conserving his energy. If he tried the door, he knew it would be locked. There was no need to step away from his daughter.

The man who’d let himself into their home had promised Will food, as he carefully laid him in the bed next to Abigail, and then he’d vanished while the room was still spinning. Whatever he’d given Will, it had been a significantly stronger dose than the one Will had been forced to give to Abigail.

“If you both take it willingly,” the man had murmured in Will’s ear, a knife to his back, “I won’t have to force you.”

Abigail’s had been a little pill, ostensibly children’s tylenol. Will’s had been an injection, sharp in the crook of his arm. There was still a smear of blood there, tiny and brown.

Will remembered the sound of growling, a yip and yelp before the knife had left his back and the man had turned to the dogs instead, calm up until the moment Will wasn’t himself anymore. He’d tried to reach out, to stop the attacker, to defend his pack, his daughter, his home, but the sedative had hit hard and hit fast, and he was on the floor before he could even say anything.

He absently picked at the dried blood on his skin before swinging his legs carefully over the side of the bed. There was water, at least, on the bedside table, and Will drank two glasses before he felt even a little more human.

Will needed facts. He needed to concentrate on something tangible so he could remain calm and light with Abigail when she woke. The last thing he wanted was to wake her, to have her panic, to have her think that they were in danger.

So here were the facts:

He and Abigail had come home from the store, where a guy who looked vaguely familiar had accidentally bumped their cart. He'd waved at Abigail, who'd enthusiastically waved back, and gone on his way.

They'd come home, and Will had released Abigail into the house to greet the dogs as he'd started to unpack. He'd filled Abby's cup with juice and helped her up onto the barstools at the counter as he started chopping vegetables for dinner.

Someone had rung the doorbell--

No. No they hadn't. Will rubbed his eyes. They hadn't because he hadn't locked the door behind himself, he'd been absentminded, chatting to Abigail as he wrangled a few dogs away from the door with his knee and kicked it shut with his heel.

So someone had come in, had come into the kitchen and surprised them both. Will had tried to grab a knife but…

Will felt dizzy and sick. He felt like the pit of his stomach had fallen to his feet, like he was at once floating and stone-heavy.

He'd tried to grab the knife, but the man had grabbed Abigail. She'd been more upset by the toppling of her cup, her loud shriek of indignance muted only by the dog's barking.

"I havin' that," she informed the man, who bounced her clumsily as though she was a colicky infant.

The man had looked right past her, to Will, his smile wide.

Honey, I'm home .

The words stuck with Will. Honey, I'm home. Cliche classic.

The man said them as if they were an affectionate tease, not artifice. He held Abigail gingerly, as if truly worried he might hurt her in her unhappy squirming.

He'd told Abigail they were going on a trip. A special surprise for her and her Daddy. The words had settled her immediately; an offer of a surprise always did.

"For Hammikah?" She'd asked, and Will's hand had clenched around the knife even as he was made to set it down.

He hadn't wanted to hurt them. Will twisted the scene in his head and saw that clearly. He'd wanted Will's acquiescence, if not his consent. He'd demanded Will *participate* in their abduction. He'd wanted the facade of willingness.

Will pushed himself to stand and circled their room slowly, looking for any give in the door -- locked, as expected -- the walls, the single window. For all intents and purposes, it was just a room in a house, nothing more. There was no sound proofing, which meant they were far enough away from people that the man needn't worry that they could be heard if Will called for help, or struggled. They had light, and a small heater in the corner that hummed to life when Will turned it on.

He'd wanted them to come willingly, to pretend that everything was fine. That everything was normal.

Will pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes until he saw stars.

What the hell was going on??

The first 48 hours in any missing persons case were crucial. Hannibal would have known this even if he hadn't been with the country's unofficial leading expert in criminal psychology.

After 48 hours, the chances of survival dwindled to almost nothing.

Hannibal knew this, and yet when he was certain Buster was in safe hands, the first thing he did was turn his car around rather than call the cops.

He knew Will. He knew that Will would fight tooth and nail to protect himself and their daughter. He also knew the methods and motivations of their captor.

Marcus's taunts made perfect sense now, and while Hannibal's chest felt painfully tight, there was also a sense of relief there. Marcus had a specific method to his fixations. He *became* the object of his focus. He would not harm Will or Abigail, because it was Hannibal he'd chosen to center himself on, and Hannibal would not harm them.

He might, if provoked or pushed too far out of the path he'd set himself on, be rough, but Hannibal trusted Will to maneuver carefully, knowing Hannibal would come for him.

Because of course he would come for him. For *them.* There was not a doubt in Hannibal's mind, now, that he would retrieve his family and destroy the man who'd taken them away.

He considered what he knew:

Marcus became his fixations. He used their mannerisms, their way of dressing, adapted speech patterns, incorporated likes and dislikes. He absorbed them like a sponge. The times he'd done this before Hannibal had led to the object of his obsession filing a report for harassment or stalking.

He'd never killed anyone yet.

But Hannibal was certain that to fulfil his fantasy entirely, Marcus would need to remove Hannibal from the equation permanently; he would need to be Hannibal, because there was no Hannibal left.

That didn't worry him. Though Marcus was dangerous and deluded, Hannibal knew how to handle himself.

No, what worried him was how Abigail would take this. What would she understand? What would she do when Marcus tried to treat her like his daughter? She wasn't a pushover, even with the two of them she spoke her mind and made her displeasures known clearly. If he did something she didn't like, or scared her…

His hands tightened around the steering wheel, and it was only then that Hannibal noticed that his knuckles were covered in blood.

Buster's blood. The tiny dog who when he took a liking to you would defend you to the ends of the earth. Sweet, loyal thing. Hannibal absently rubbed his thumb over the blood to clean it away.

Marcus had left clues, he'd been careless, banking on his cleverness, so far in his delusion that he felt he could outsmart anyone. He'd spoken of a cabin, of his father signing it over to him. All it would take was a phone call, a suggestion that he worried for Marcus' life, and he'd have an address.

He had to call the police. There was no avoiding it; it looked too bad for Hannibal if he *didn't* report his husband and child missing, and if he managed to pull this off without showing his hand too clearly, Will would wonder why he hadn't.

But he could give himself the advantage. No, officer, he didn't know anyone who would want to bring him or his family harm. No, his husband had no enemies. No, he had no idea where they could be.

Enough to put the cops on the scent, enough to beat them to the punch. Enough to take his vengeance.

What Marcus had done could not be overlooked, or allowed to go unpunished. Hannibal felt the familiar stirrings of rage within him, still manageable, but building fast.

He picked up his phone.

Abigail woke when the door creaked open, snuffling unhappily. The man was there, with a tray of food, and a bulge at his hip beneath his shirt that betrayed the location of his gun. He kept that side away from Will, setting the tray on the bedside table.

"Good morning, sweetheart," he said. "I have a nursery set up for the little one, but I thought you would prefer to nap together, just this once."

“She won’t sleep on her own,” Will whispered, for once grateful for Abigail’s night terrors. “She sleeps in bed with me at home.”

“Adults need privacy,” the man said, in a voice that sent chills down Will’s spine. “She can nap in her room and then join us if she has to.”

“Daddy,” Abigail mumbled, eyes half shut as she rolled to face Will. “Where we go?”

“Nowhere, baby girl,” Will told her, eyes still on the stranger as he stepped closer to the bed and knelt on it, stroking Abigail’s hair from her face. “We’re not going anywhere, we’re just going to wait for Papa to arrive now.”

“When he come?” she asked, yawning wide and stretching her little limbs. She wasn’t quite awake yet, and perhaps that was for the best. Will could feel his entire body almost vibrating with how tensely he held himself.

“Soon,” he promised. “Very, very soon.”

As the man moved to touch her, Will’s hand shot out and wrapped tight around his wrist.

“Don’t.”

The man looked at him, and the stare felt like ice against Will’s skin. Still, he didn’t let go. He’d be damned if the man touched his child.

“Let go,” The man told him quietly, his voice aimed at Will only, as Abigail rolled onto her belly and reached out to wrap one little hand in Will’s shirt to hold onto it. “Because I’d hate to make you.”

“Don’t touch her.”

“Then you will bring her to the nursery,” He countered, turning his wrist to test Will’s hold. “Tell her everything is fine, and let her sleep til the drugs wear off.”

“Like hell I will,” Will hissed, fingers tightening, aiming for the pressure point between the delicate bones of the arm with vicious fingers.

With his other hand, the stranger reached back and drew his weapon, keeping it low enough that should Abigail turn over again she wouldn’t see it, but clear enough for Will to see.

“One shot,” He murmured, “doesn’t matter where it lands. Just one and she’s dead. We’re too far out for a hospital, too far to drive with such a little one bleeding so badly. So I’d rethink your strategy.”

It had the sound and feel of a bluff. The man had taken them alive for a reason, he wanted them alive, he’d even given them different medications rather than risking Abigail’s life with some sort of injection.

But this was his daughter’s life, and Will was not willing to gamble with it.

“Sweetheart,” he whispered, nudging Abigail gently. “Baby girl, Daddy prepared a bedroom for you. Let’s go have a nap, hmm?”

He’d hoped the word would spur her to more fuss, a refusal to nap that came with being three and wanting to be older than you were, but she must have still been exhausted. She merely lifted her arms, tucking her face in Will’s neck when he lifted her.

The man guided Will down the hall, reaching out a hand that Will refused when his hazy mind had him stumbling.

“I have it,” He hissed, cradling Abigail’s head with the back of his hand.

The ‘room’ that had been prepared was an over glorified closet, with a small milkcrate full of toys and a crib jammed into the back that Will wanted to scoff at. The man’s preparations had been paltry; he had no concept of how old Abigail was, though Will saw he’d at least snagged a package of pull-ups that would be close enough in size.

Will settled Abigail into the crib, pausing when he saw the stuffed polar bear shoved into the corner.

He’d seen the man before. In the grocery store. And before that. And no doubt the man had seen them, a thousand times. Enough to have snatched up a toy Will himself had tried to buy for her, that day at the zoo.

“Look, baby girl,” he said, feeling eyes on his back as he tucked Abigail in. “Papa bought you a present.”

Like hell he was going to let this man take credit, or go anywhere near his child. As far as Abigail was concerned, everything was alright. Will and Hannibal had planned this. A small excursion.

Abigail was too tired to care about Will’s efforts. She wrapped her little arms around the polar bear, rolled over, and was asleep in seconds.

Will pivoted on his foot and quickly turned around, but found the gun in his face this time, preempting his effort to try and overpower the man. He wouldn’t fight him, not this close to Abigail, not when she could get hurt.

“Now, back to the bedroom,” the man said, gesturing with his gun that Will should walk first. So Will did, careful to pace his steps slowly, to stutter his speed just a little, trying to bring the gun up against his back, where he could reach it when he turned and disarm the man.

But he was clever, he didn’t come near enough, and so Will found himself in the room again, but now he was alone with their kidnapper.

“What do you want?”

“Some gratitude would be nice,” the other shrugged, leaning almost casually against the locked door. Will snorted.

“Gratitude? For kidnapping?”

“I made a home for us,” he countered. “A bed for you to sleep in, a nursery for our little girl--”

“She’s not yours,” Will snarled. “And there’s no ‘us’ that involves you. Who the fuck even are you?”

“You don’t recognize me?”

Will blinked, his vision still a little blurry, his head still a little muddled. He looked the man over, tried to remember if he’d seen him anywhere but in passing, if he’d ever spoken with him, worked with him, knew him in any capacity.

But after a while, other things started falling into place. The way he was dressed, the way he combed his hair, the way he tried to drawl his voice in a pitiful facsimile of Hannibal’s accent.

Holy shit.

“You’re doing a piss-poor job of imitating him,” Will said, “but that still doesn’t answer my question.”

With a deep sigh, the man raised his eyes to the ceiling, his lips working in frustration, before leveling a look on Will again. “You can call me Marcus, for now.”

“For now,” Will repeated.

“You’ll adjust,” Marcus said. “It’ll be hard, but you’ll get there. I’ll help you.”

“Help me with *what* ?” Will spat.

“A marriage requires two people,” Marcus said, stepping closer to Will. “Compromise.”

“I’m not going to play house with you.” Will stepped back. The mattress hit the back of his knees and his breath caught. Marcus was still between him and the door, still holding the gun in his hands, and Will still felt as if he was swimming through molasses.

“It’ll be alright,” Marcus said. “I’ll make it good for you. It doesn’t need to be difficult, if you behave.”

Will bared his teeth. It didn’t halt Marcus’s slow progress across the room.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Marcus told him, “But I will, if I have to. Sometimes people need a little bit of… correction, to learn. You won’t make me discipline you, will you?”

“What the fuck?” Will breathed, he felt like he was losing his mind, like he’d been thrust into some nightmarish parallel universe where this caricature of Hannibal was trying to-- “Don’t touch me.”

“That’s not what you say to your husband, is it?”

“You’re not my husband,” Will pointed out, his voice rising just a little. He was wary of calling out too loudly; no one would hear, but Abigail would wake up. And she didn’t need to see this, she *couldn’t* see this.

“You’ll adjust,” Marcus said again, and this time he stepped up faster than Will was banking on, and he lost his balance, sitting heavily on the bed. When lips met his own he whined, turning his head away in disgust as his hands came up to shove the man away.

God, he felt like a newborn foal. He was so damn weak. A hand shoved him down and Will went, unable to catch himself in time, and then Marcus was on him. Body heavy and unwelcome pressing Will into the lumpy mattress.

Will squirmed, cursing and hissing as he felt lips touch his skin, hands press him down, the building erection of the man above him.

“Stop,” he snarled. “Off, get the fuck *off me!”*

Something kicked in, some vestigial part of Will’s brain that urged him to fight and break free at all costs. Whatever training had been ingrained in him at the academy, then later at the FBI filtered through the drugged haze and Will lashed out harder. He drew up a knee and rolled them until he was on top and Marcus beneath him. He pushed up, trying to get away, but a hand snagged his shirt and yanked him back down again.

Will felt winded, panicked, dizzy. He groped around for the hand holding the gun and squeezed, beneath the wrist, behind the thumb, enough to ease the grip, enough to get the weapon free, enough to aim it to the pillow and pull the trigger and--

The slap came so suddenly and out of left field, almost as loud as the gunshot itself had been, and Will felt his entire world careen sideways. He made a sound, soft and helpless, and fell to the bed again, with Marcus on top once more. The gun clattered to the ground somewhere, away from them both. When Will’s vision cleared enough to make out Marcus’ features he reared up and spat at him, earning another slap for his trouble.

He was tired, he was so fucking tired! Whatever he’d been injected with was still brewing strong in his system and Will felt like he wasn’t even connected to his body anymore.

“You do that again,” Marcus’ voice was strained, angry. “You do that again and I will tie you down and make you *watch* when I kill her, you understand me? *Do you understand me?”*

Will’s head was spinning, he felt so sick… he turned his face to the door, still locked, still between him and Abigail, and grit his teeth. The gun was real, the threat was real, and Will had no control here. None.

“Yes,” he managed. Lips pressed to his smarting cheek and Will grimaced in disgust, but he didn’t fight back this time. He just lay there.

“Good,” panted breaths, uncoordinated fumbling hands at Will’s belt, his trousers, then a sigh. “Fuck. You’ve gone and killed the entire mood, you ungrateful shit.”

Will closed his eyes and breathed as evenly as he could manage, listening as the man got off the creaking bed, pulled up his own fly, and took the gun up from the floor. Footsteps to the door, seven of them, then a shift of the lock, the door opening, closing, and locking again.

Will lay there, stunned and revolted and exhausted, and didn’t open his eyes for a long time.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

> *Hannibal was a faithless man. He didn't pray. But as he headed out the door, all he could think was* please.

Chapter Notes

> Major warning for physical and sexual assault on Will in this one (no graphic details but it's pretty rough) also non-consensual drug use.

Slowly, strength returned to Will's body. He was able to sit up properly, without the room spinning. He paced from one end to the other, inspecting everything.

The windows were sealed, but even if they hadn't been, all Will could see was dark, thick forest. Besides, he and Marcus both knew Will wouldn't flee without Abigail. And he couldn't imagine wandering the woods with her, lost, trying to comfort a frightened toddler.

There was a small bathroom, with no mirror. The lid to the toilet tank had been removed too, and all the furniture in the bedroom was nailed to the floor. Marcus had been thorough in removing any potential weapons.

Will tested the doorknob quietly. He'd known it would be locked, but he'd hoped for any sort of shift that might allow him to jimmy it. Nothing. The door was perfectly set into its frame.

Down the hall, Abigail woke with a cry.

Will's heart leapt into his chest, rabbit fast, choking him. He gave the door another jerk, harder this time, as Abigail burst into the frightened wails that came any time they tried to have her sleep on her own. Will slammed his palm against the door, hard enough to leave an ache in his wrist.

"Marcus!" he yelled. "Marcus!"

"Daddy!" Abigail shrieked, and Will rammed his entire weight against the door, determined to chew his way through it if it meant he could get to his daughter.

"I'm coming, sweetheart!" he called, keeping his voice as calm as possible. "Daddy's coming! *Marcus!"*

“I’ve got it,” came the calm response from just behind the door. Will rammed into it again.

“Don’t you dare touch her, don’t you *touch her, Marcus!”*

“She needs someone to comfort her,” Marcus replied, his voice growing quieter as he stepped away from Will’s room. “And if that doesn’t work, she needs to learn to self-soothe. She’s old enough, now.”

The sound that came out of Will’s throat was feral, animalistic. The panic that flooded through him, filling his vision with white, his veins with adrenaline, was so immense he felt like he could yank the door off its hinges. But when he tried… he couldn’t. His knuckles stung with how hard he’d scraped them against the door, he’d broken a nail clawing at the wood, but he didn’t care. He needed to get out of there, he needed to get to Abigail, to comfort his baby girl.

“Abby!” He called, though he doubted she could hear him through the tantrum that was building. “Abby, Daddy’s here, he’s coming, I’m coming, I promise!”

Abigail kept crying, her helpless sobs and calls for *Daddy, Daddy!* tore at Will’s very being. Tears prickled his own eyes and he shoved himself against the door again.

“Marcus,” he calmed his tone, tried to be pragmatic about this. “Marcus, please. *Please* let me hold my daughter. Let me… let me calm her. You can…” he winced, curling a fist against the door. “I’ll play your game, I’ll play happy families. I’ll do anything, *anything* you want but please, *please* don’t hurt my baby.”

He heard Abigail’s protests grow louder, a shriek of outrage that tore at him.

“I want Daddy!” She screamed, and Will nearly choked on his own desperation.

“Marcus *, please* ,” he begged. “She’s just a baby.”

Beneath his hand, the doorknob clicked and jerked. Will flinched back, enough for the door to swing inward, but close enough that he was able to throw himself at Marcus the second the door opened.

He could see Abigail behind him, standing in the hallway, tears streaming, face red and scrunched up as she screeched. Marcus caught him by the waist as he tried to get to her, hauling him close.

“I wouldn’t hurt our baby,” he whispered in Will’s ear. “What kind of father would I be?”

Will wanted to dig his nails into Marcus’s face and peel his skin right off. “Let me go,” he whispered. “She needs me.”

“Daddy!” Abigail yelled, bolting forward on little legs.

“Quiet her, or I will,” Marcus hissed, shoving Will towards her.

Will knelt and caught his little girl against him, sitting heavily on the floor and gathering her in his lap.

“I’m sorry baby,” he whispered. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, the door got stuck, isn’t that silly? What a silly door,”

Abigail clung to him and howled, sobbing for no other reason than because she needed to let that energy out, to have it go *somewhere.* Will hushed her, rocking her gently and stroking her hair. The pretty braids that Hannibal had done the day before had worked themselves free and her hair was bent out of shape from how she’d slept.

In that moment, Will couldn’t think of anything but making Abigail feel safe. He knew he couldn’t make a run for it with her like this, he didn’t even want to try with her at all, if it meant she was in any way near the gun or some sort of violence. No, if they left it would have to be over Marcus’ incapacitated body, and Will was unsure just then how to make that happen.

“Daddy make go ‘way,” Abigail mumbled, when her sobs lightened to hiccups.

“I know, sweetheart,” Will whispered. “I know, I want to go too, but we have to wait for Papa, it’s such a big surprise.”

“Don’t wannit.”

Will laughed, breathing in her toddler smell, burying his face in her hair. “I know, baby,” he breathed. “I know, not long now, I promise. Daddy keeps his promises, right?”

“Yeah?”

Will pulled back and held up his pinkie finger for Abigail to hook hers onto. “Not long now,” Will repeated. Abigail frowned.

“Not long.”

“And then Papa will be here,”

“Daddy-Papa comin’?”

“Soon,” Will promised. He didn’t look at Marcus, though he could feel him staring at the two of them. “Very soon. But right now Daddy has to talk to Papa’s friend, okay? Just for a little while. Can you play with your bear?”

Abigail shot Marcus a dirty look over Will’s shoulder, her entire face scrunched up in judgement.

“Not a friend,” she decided. Will bit back a helpless laugh, hushing his beautiful, *brilliant* little girl.

“Of course he is,” he insisted, hating to lie but knowing he had to, for both their sakes.

“How come I not meet him?”

An excellent question. Will pressed a kiss to her forehead. “He’s been helping to plan Papa’s surprise,” he explained, which was *technically* not a lie. “He’s been too busy to visit. Can you go play for a bit?”

“I hungry,” Abigail insisted. Will shot Marcus a look over his shoulder.

“She’s hungry,” he repeated. “We missed dinner. We could sit her down with something and go have a… conversation.”

“I want nuggies,” Abigail immediately piped up. Will swallowed. It was one thing to have a fussy toddler at home, with her *parents,* who could teach her patiently about requests and demands, and another when they were kidnapped and held hostage. Will doubted Marcus had an array of kid-friendly food in this place, if he had any at all.

“I’ll set some to bake, sweetheart, but you’ll have to be patient,” Marcus told her. Abigail didn’t change her expression when she looked at him, however, no smile there to show that she’d been won over with food. Good girl. Clever girl.

“I no wait.”

“They’ll be cold, baby,” Will told her. “Why don’t you play with your bear and we’ll start on lunch, okay?”

Abigail gave Marcus a narrow-eyed look before looking up at Will again. “Has juice?”

“I’ll get some for you,” Will promised, “and some apples til the nuggets are ready, deal?”

Abigail nodded, decisive and independent. “Deel.”

“That’s my girl,” Will praised, kissing her forehead again. He didn’t want to let her go, he didn’t want to ever let her go, but he knew that he couldn’t speak with Marcus if she was present, kids were sponges, they picked everything up, and Abigail was more perceptive than most, given her history. “Now, be good. Go play with bear in your room.”

After a few more moments of coercion, she finally climbed off Will’s lap and toddled back to the room he’d put her in. Marcus closed the door just enough to leave a gap for Abigail to see out, clearly certain there would be another tantrum if he locked her in. He gestured behind Will with his chin.

“Get back in there while I make her something.”

Will narrowed his eyes but didn’t argue. He stood up and moved silently to the bedroom again, allowing it to be locked once he was inside. This was insane. This was so far out of Will’s control that he didn’t even know what to do. He couldn’t think clearly, he couldn’t think in a straight line. He knew that they had to get out of here, that they had to stay safe until someone found them, but he didn’t know *how.*

Abigail would stop taking his white lies as answers, she'd demand things, she'd get petulant and throw another tantrum. He imagined that Marcus wouldn't take kindly to being hit, to having to change her pull up, to having to actually *care* for a living, breathing, child.

The doorknob rattled a little and Will stepped back, enough for Marcus to come into the room and shut the door again.

"You don't have kids," Will said, the observation clear. "You don't know how much... She needs a lot of care, she needs--"

"I have one now," Marcus said with a shrug. "I'll pick up on it. Feed them, put them to bed, make them do their homework."

"She… She's so young. She'll get upset easily, but I can keep her calm, if you just--"

"You'll have to keep yourself calm first," Marcus said, eyes narrowed. "I'm not stupid, Will. I know it's going to take time for our little family to adjust. I'm not going to let you roam freely through the house."

Will felt a lump in his throat the size of a boulder. He could hear Abigail singing, distant and faint. "I just need to be with her. That's all I'm asking for. I'll do any--" he cut himself off this time, the realization of what he was promising weighing on him. He had no idea how he was going to pull this off without the unthinkable happening. "I'll listen, I'll be quiet, I'll do whatever you want, but I need to be with her."

"Will you make yourself complacent?" Marcus asked, pulling a syringe from his jacket pocket. "Will you be a good boy for me?"

Will swallowed hard, eyes on the syringe. He remembered how long it took him to recover from the last dose Marcus had given him, how weak he'd felt, how absolutely incomprehensibly *doped up.*

"I can't look after her if I'm knocked out," he pointed out softly. Marcus shrugged, flicking the thing with his finger absently.

"That's not what I asked you."

"I'll… I'll be good," Will settled on finally. He wasn't sure just how deep he'd have to sink into this disgusting exchange to keep Abigail safe. He knew, deep down, that he'd do anything, truly anything, to keep his daughter safe from harm, but hell if he'd offer himself up on a platter so easily.

"You won't try to fight me? Push me away when I'm trying to enjoy a night in with my *husband?"*

Will winced, hands fisting at his sides. "I won't fight you."

"Look, Will, I know this will be a difficult change, for all of us. And to ease the transition, to prevent any… runaways, or attempts at being a hero, I'm going to give you just a little of this, every few hours. Enough that you can move, of course, because I'm not quite at the

point where changing a screaming toddler is appealing," he laughed then, actually *laughed,* "but not enough that a romp through the woods is viable with a toddler. It's cold out, imagine if you got tired? Tried to rest against a tree? Took a nap? You'd freeze to death, both of you. And we can't have that, can we?"

Will's jaw worked, his entire body felt flushed in the most uncomfortable way. He wanted to be sick. He had nothing in his stomach to be sick with.

"No," he ground out after a moment. Marcus nodded.

"You try anything, and I'll give you the full dose. Knock you out cold for twenty-four hours. And who knows what I'll be pushed to do in that time? Toddlers are *frustrating* things aren't they?"

"Shut up," Will hissed. "Just… I get it, alright? I get it. Drug me up, hurt me, but leave her alone, let me look after my child."

"Be *polite* ," Marcus said, his voice a low, dangerous rumble. "We have to set a good example, don't we?"

Will ground his teeth together, jaw aching from the pressure, and gave a sharp nod. He rolled his sleeve up, exposing the crook of his arm, bruised from the last clumsy injection.

"You do it," Marcus said, one hand on the gun at his hip, the other holding the syringe out towards Will. "Show me you're going to try to make this family work."

To Will's horror, his hands were shaking as he took the syringe from Marcus's grasp. He'd wanted to keep his composure, to appear calm and collected, but Abigail's presence had thoroughly rattled him. Biting back a murmur of discomfort, Will slid the needle into his vein, feeling the unpleasant rush of coolness.

It was quick, whatever it was. Already, Will felt lightheaded, dizzy. When he tried to step towards the door, he wobbled, collapsing against Marcus's chest.

The syringe rattled against the floor but didn't shatter. Vaguely, Will cursed that it didn't, that he wouldn't have even a sliver of glass to use to cut this asshole's throat. When Marcus grasped Will's chin and lifted his head and kissed him, Will groaned but didn't try to shove him away. He just closed his eyes and tried to breathe through his nose until it *stopped.*

"Kiss back," Marcus muttered as he pulled back, slapping Will's face not-quite-lightly to emphasize his point.

So Will did.

He swallowed down his disgust, he thought of how this would help, would allow him to comfort his little girl when she was upset, would allow him to see the house, even if he was half awake at the time, and allow him to plan their escape. He thought of that as he set his hands to either side of Marcus' face and kissed him properly; mouth open, tongue pressing forward, body easing into the motion.

He was dizzy, he was so fucking dizzy… he needed air. When Will pulled back with a gasp, Marcus moved to kissing his cheek, his jaw, sucking a bruise against Will's throat as Will tried to hold himself upright without falling over.

Just for now, he reminded himself, *just until we can leave, just until she's safe, I need to keep her safe…*

When Marcus clumsily caught Will's mouth again, he whined, pressing closer, making it as believable as he could, for as long as he could, so that he'd be allowed to leave the room, so that he wasn't knocked out and unable to get to Abigail when she needed him.

"That's it," Marcus murmured against his lips, "just let it happen."

The police delayed Hannibal by a considerable amount. He'd checked the whole house first, making sure there was nothing that might lead them to Marcus before Hannibal got his hands on him, but then he'd been forced to make the call.

The questions had gone on for hours. The same questions, on a loop, as if Hannibal walking through their daily routines for the third time might unlock the secret of what happened to his family. One officer dropped a few implications of 'custodial parent abductions,' and though it certainly would have helped Hannibal to have them think Abigail was safe with a parent and slow their search, he could not help but be defensive of Will.

"My husband would *never* ," he assured the officer, and the questions began anew.

Hannibal was able to go through his files on Marcus only in the very early hours of the morning, jotting down numbers and searching to see if Marcus had ever mentioned the location of the cabin himself. He hadn't. But he had mentioned that it belonged to his father.

At a time that felt more humane than half past five, Hannibal started calling. He called one of the officers listed on Marcus' arrest record, he called his father. Neither could tell him much, but his father told Hannibal that there wasn't just one cabin in the family, there were two.

"We don't use 'em in the win'er," he said, his drawl so thick Hannibal could barely parse through it. "But we got 'em."

"I'm afraid I fear for Marcus' state of mind," Hannibal replied, "and his safety. He made mention of a cabin to me, and I thought, perhaps, he would find shelter there, since he wasn't home."

"N'aww Marcus hates those cabins," his father replied. "Always hated goin' on vacation, hated doin' up the house, hated fishin'. Fucked up kid."

"Regardless," Hannibal interrupted him gently. "Perhaps, an address?"

He got both. One cabin was in Delaware, another in the woods of Virginia. Marcus' father explained that the family had neglected the places for years now, since he'd gotten too sick to

travel and his “piece’o shit kid” didn’t deserve to inherit them when he died. He had no idea which Marcus would prefer.

Frustrated, Hannibal forced himself to brew a pot of coffee as he considered his options. He could get to both of them, without much effort. However, should he choose the wrong one, should he arrive at an empty cabin, he would have wasted precious hours and put Will and Abigail in more danger. Marcus was predictable but mercurial; should he grow frustrated that his fantasy was cracking, that it wasn’t picture perfect, he’d snap, and while Will was no pushover, with Abigail there he wouldn’t risk an attack.

He looked at the addresses again.

Virginia would make more sense in regards to location, but if he’d been stalking Hannibal’s family, he would have gone looking for information on Will. He would have seen his connections to the state. Surely it would be safer to transport them to a place Will wasn’t so intimately familiar with? But the Delaware cabin was closer to a small town, closer to people, would he risk a chance of someone overhearing a struggle, or a little one crying?

Hannibal rubbed a hand over his face with a groan and pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes until he saw stars.

Can make stars, Daddy-Papa!

He jerked back, looking at the ceiling instead.

He had to make a decision, and he had to make one *now.* It had been over twelve hours since his family had been abducted.

Delaware, Hannibal decided. He didn’t have time to reconsider. He would want to get Will as far away from anything familiar, anything he might recognize, as possible. And the town would have a store, supplies. He’d need pull-ups, juice, things a toddler might eat. If he saw himself as Abigail’s father, Marcus would want to get the job done correctly.

Hannibal was a faithless man. He didn’t pray. But as he headed out the door, all he could think was *please.*

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

“Take her,” Marcus almost threw Abigail at Will, who stumbled, holding her close. “Clean her, make her shut up.”

“You shut up!” Abigail quipped back, and Will laughed, he couldn’t help himself.

Abby has had quite enough of this experience, thanks very much.

Chapter Notes

Warning for violence and murder.

Abigail liked the nuggets but refused to eat the carrots and beans. She squirmed about in Will’s lap as he held her, barely conscious and doing his best not to fall onto her and the table both. Marcus gave up attempting to feed her quickly, and Will took over.

She still didn’t eat the carrots, but she liked popping the beans out one by one.

After that, another tantrum; she needed changing, and she wanted to wear something new. At home, Hannibal and Will made sure Abigail had access to enough clothes to pick and choose for all weather and temperatures. Here, she was wearing the same thing for the second day in a row and it was stressing her out.

“Want bath!” she shrieked, shoving hard at Marcus as he tried to hold her. “Want BATH!”

“Take her,” he almost threw her at Will, who stumbled, holding her close. “Clean her, make her shut up.”

“You shut up!” Abigail quipped back, and Will laughed, he couldn’t help himself.

“Abby, no,” he told her. “That’s rude, sweetheart.”

“ *He* rude.” she pointed out, clinging to Will. “Can’t be friend of Daddy-Papa, he not like rude.”

“No, no he doesn’t,” Will agreed, stroking her hair. “It’s alright sweetheart, let’s go take a bath hmm? Then we can play dress up.”

Marcus led them to another bathroom, not particularly clean, not particularly dirty. He waited for Will to let Abigail go in first before half-closing the door and slapping Will hard across the face.

“Don’t you dare laugh at me,” he hissed, stepping up close. “We are meant to be a *unit,* putting up a unified *front.* How will she learn to respect me if you encourage her?”

“Respect is earned,” Will snapped back. “And you’re not coming in here as I bathe her. Wait outside the door like the creep you are, but you will not come in.”

“Careful, Will,” Marcus whispered. *“Careful.”*

I’m being as careful as a fucking can, Will thought, rubbing ruefully at his sore cheek.

Abby was clingy as Will filled the tub, curling up on Wills lap with a disgruntled frown and her thumb jammed into her mouth. “We go home,” she muttered to Will. “Fluff dog miss us.”

“I’m sure all the dogs miss us,” Will said, leaning heavily against the edge of the tub, barely holding himself up. It wasn’t the ideal amount of strength to bathe a toddler with, but he’d be damned if he let Marcus in with them. “Papa just has to take them to a sitter, then he’ll be along for our trip.”

“Trips are fun,” Abigail insisted stubbornly. “This *stupid.”*

It was, to put it bluntly. It was unbearably stupid. But it was Will's job to keep Abigail safe, emotionally as well as physically. He didn’t want this to scar her. He wanted this to be an awful story he sat her down and told her when she was an adult, not another nightmare to haunt her.

“Where are your manners, little lady?” Will asked, turning off the taps and helping her into the tub. “What would Papa think about that mouth of yours?”

“He come here and he tell me,” Abigail decided.

Will didn’t argue with that. He concentrated on staying awake as Abigail splashed about. It was paltry, just soap to make bubbles with, and no toys to play with. Will fashioned a puppet out of a facecloth, put on a voice, made sure that Abigail was giggling before he took her out of the tub.

After a bath, Abigail was much more likely to take a nap, for which Will was grateful. Marcus seemed less likely to trigger if she wasn’t in the room, and Will was building up his strength. If he could get his hand around Marcus’ throat *just so,* if he could press to the carotid and hold on just long enough…

“Daddy!” Will blinked down at Abigail, in fresh pull-ups and nothing else. “Need nap.”

“Yes, baby, you’ll take a nap.”

“No, *Daddy* need nap.”

Will laughed gently. “I’ll nap with you, how about that?”

Abigail refused to put the same clothes on that she’d been in the day before, so Will had to get creative. They played ‘dress-up’ for a good thirty minutes before Abby was satisfied. She left the bathroom proudly wrapped up in twisted towels and a pillowcase, and made her way to the bedroom.

“No, no,” Marcus caught her by her little shoulders and turned her around again. “Nursery’s this way.”

“I sleep wif *Daddy* ,” Abigail told him, with all the condescension a three year old could manage wrapped up into a single sentence.

“She does,” Will said, hating the nervousness that crept into his voice. “She sleeps with us every night, she has nightmares.”

The logical extension of that, that Abigail might be forced to sleep between Will and *Marcus* , was too horrifying to think about. Will swallowed down a wave of disgust.

“Well, she’s a big girl now,” Marcus said, in the mock-cheerful voice of a public access children’s programming host. “Only *babies* sleep with their daddies.”

“Then I a baby,” Abigail declared, flopping onto her back in the middle of the hallway. “Up, Daddy,” she insisted, raising her arms.

Marcus glared at Will, the meaning in his gaze clear: *handle this, or I will.*

“Baby,” Will said, crouching down to Abigail’s level, “Can you go wait for Daddy in the nursery?”

“No,” she told him happily. Will cupped her cheek. Then he leaned in and stage-whispered.

“What if Daddy gave you a piece of chocolate.”

Abigail’s eyes went wide. They’d only recently started giving her treats, and Hannibal more than Will, so the fact that Will was offering was *incredible.*

“I go,” she agreed, “but chok-lit first.”

“Go play,” Will countered, “and stay in the nursery til Daddy comes to get you, and I’ll give you the best chocolate you’ve ever seen.”

“The best?” Abigail narrowed her eyes. “How know?”

“If it isn’t,” Will said, “I’ll give you two pieces.”

Abigail considered the bargain, long enough that Will could feel Marcus tensing behind him, shuffling his position, impatient and eager to do… something. He didn’t react, didn’t turn to look over his shoulder, he looked at his daughter.

“Kay,” she said finally. “But you promise?” She held out her little finger, and Will hooked his around it, leaning in to kiss her little hand.

“Promise. Go on.”

Abigail shifted onto her knees and crawled towards the nursery, giving Marcus a glare before she closed the door. Will needed to use the wall to stand back up again, leaning heavily against it when he got up there. He could feel the drug wearing off a little, and knew that Marcus kept a goddamn alarm on his phone to remind him when to dose Will again, so it was now or never.

Before Marcus could say anything, Will turned to go towards the bedroom, drawing his hand against the wall as he went. He heard the pleased *humph* Marcus made, claiming this as a victory. Good. Let him think he’d won this time, let him think he was breaking Will down.

Once in the bedroom, Will dropped his hands to his belt, working it open, and when Marcus closed the door, he slid it out of his pants.

“See how easy it is to obey?” Marcus said from behind him, “to just be *good* like I tell you?”

“Yeah,” Will sighed, wrapping the tongue around his palm. “Easy.”

He waited, counted the steps Marcus took; he himself was five steps into the room, and when Marcus took his third, Will swung around and lashed out with the belt. It wrapped around Marcus’ head, the buckle striking him hard beneath the eye and shocking him into bringing his hands up to protect himself.

It was the moment Will needed to draw his arm back and punch him in the face. Once. Twice, before Marcus regained himself and grabbed Will’s hand to yank him off balance.

Will tumbled all the way down to the floor, the drug in his system knocking him right off his feet. Marcus went down with him, gripping a fistful of Will’s hair and slamming his skull against the floor.

“You little bitch,” he hissed. “Ungrateful, traitorous little--”

The room spun. Will heaved, coughing up saliva onto the floor. He lashed out, smacking his fists against Marcus’s face, his shoulders. Marcus was forced to pin him, holding Will’s hands down with his own, but like that he could no longer strike at him.

One eye closed against the nauseating pulses of light, Will peered up at Marcus. He was bleeding copiously just under his eye, the belt having cut deep into his cheek.

“I warned you,” Marcus growled, teeth bared. “I told you to *behave* . Do you need to be *trained* ? Is that it? Do you think I won’t keep my promises?”

He shoved his knee up, parting Will’s thighs painfully. Will hissed, arching his back, trying to buck him off.

“I’m going to make you regret this,” Marcus hissed. “I wanted our first time to be gentle, but if this is what it takes…”

“Go ahead,” Will spat. “Get your dick wet. It won’t change anything. You’ll still be a pathetic imitation. You’re never going to *be* him.”

“Shut the fuck--”

Down the hall, there was a thud, and then Abigail shrieked at the top of her lungs, “DADDY!”

Marcus looked down at Will, and slowly, his grimace warped into a smile. Will’s heart caught in his throat.

“Don’t you fucking dare,” He growled, struggling against hands and drugs and *pain* .

“I warned you,” Marcus said gleefully. “You want to fight me? You want to be nasty and uncooperative? You’re not the only one who suffers.”

“No!” Will wrapped a leg around Marcus, trying to hold him down as the other pushed to stand. Marcus let go of one of Will’s wrists and backhanded him hard enough that Will’s head damn near bounced off the floor. Then he did it again.

Will could taste blood, could feel his nose aching. His vision was going dark and he fought it with everything he had. This wasn’t about him. He didn’t care if he was beaten bloody, but *Abigail…*

“Stay,” another slap, causing Will to heave again as his world tilted and swayed. *“Down!”*

Another slap didn’t come, though Will braced for it with a wince. Instead, Marcus’ weight moved off of him entirely, leaving Will free to struggle up and reach for him, determined to cling to him and be dead weight if it would be enough to keep him from harming his little girl.

He reared up, one eye swollen shut and the other barely seeing, arms swinging wildly and missing...

Because Marcus wasn’t standing over Will anymore, he was backing up with frantic steps and grasping arms as someone dragged him off of Will and up against a wall instead. Will scrambled up, losing his balance once, twice, before cursing and just crawling across the floor towards the struggling figures.

Like hell he was going to let Marcus win. Like hell he was going to just lay back and let someone deal with this. Like *hell.*

Marcus kicked out but Will was *wired* now, adrenaline and panic honing his rattled senses in on one target with old testament resolve. He caught Marcus’ foot, and brought his elbow down against his knee, dropping his entire weight onto him until he felt the dislocation. Marcus’ scream was muffled but it didn’t matter, only Will needed to hear it, only Will needed to be present for this retribution, only--

“Will.”

Hannibal’s voice was strained, worried, no, not just worried, *terrified.* Will looked up and nearly fell right back over again. He was here. He was actually goddamned *here,* holding Marcus in a headlock and staring down at his husband.

Will had several racing thoughts at once. He thought, with relief, that everything was over now. He thought about calling the cops, about facing Marcus in court, about people questioning Abigail and wanting to subpoena her.

He thought about what Marcus wanted to do to him. What he’d been about to do. What he was going to do to *Abby* .

Adrenaline was a hell of a drug. Will used Marcus’s struggling body to pull himself up, relishing in the broken groan of pain it drew from him. He hauled his fist back and struck, hard enough to whip Marcus’s head around, hard enough to nearly topple him and Hannibal both. Again, and again, and again, until there was blood on his knuckles, and not just his own.

“Will,” Hannibal said, his voice low, soft, quiet. “Will, you’re killing him.”

Startled, Will caught Hannibal’s gaze.

There was no judgement there. Only admiration. Awe. Hannibal looked at Will like he looked at the opera, or at a beautifully plated meal. Hannibal looked at Will as though he was a god, and Hannibal wanted to drop to his knees and worship.

“He was going to hurt our baby,” Will hissed.

For a moment, Hannibal said nothing, he let his eyes travel over Will’s face, taking in his injuries, the way he was trembling, before finally letting the words filter through.

With a quick motion, Hannibal tilted Marcus’ chin up and jerked hard, the crack a satisfying precursor to the silence that followed. Hannibal let the body drop to the ground, stepping over him to cup Will’s face instead, pressing their foreheads together.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, Will.”

Will brought a hand up to hold to Hannibal’s and closed his eyes. He was swaying, now that the adrenaline passed he felt like his body was made of lead. Everything hurt, everything ached, and he wanted nothing more than to go down the hall and take his daughter into his arms and hold her and tell her everything was alright.

“I’m,” Will swallowed, winced. “She can’t see me, see me like this, she’ll be so scared.”

“I’ve got you,” Hannibal brought Will closer, uncaring for the blood, for the mess he was making of his shirt as Will wrapped his arms around Hannibal and clung to him. “I’ve got you.”

He guided Will to the bathroom, turning on the shower and letting it warm up as he peeled away Will's clothes and took in the damage beneath. Bruising across his ribs, over his stomach, bites and hickeys over Will's jaw and throat, scratches. Will's nose was bleeding but not broken, and his swollen eye could still open, if barely. Teeth intact, lips red from his bloody nose, rather than a cut. A concussion, certainly.

"He drugged us," Will murmured, as Hannibal guided him into the shower and quickly undressed to join him. "Then just me. To keep me weak so I couldn't fight him… couldn't fight back but… he threatened her. Told me he'd hurt her, hurt our baby--"

"Hush," Hannibal cleaned Will up as gently as he could as he stood shaking under the hot water.

"So I let… I let him. But I didn't want to, I didn't, I--"

"Will," Hannibal cupped his face again. "You kept her safe. You fought for her. You have *nothing* to apologise for."

The noise Will made was ragged and raw, an agonized sound that cut Hannibal deeply.

There were no tears in his eyes, not currently, but they were glassy. Adrenaline had left him, leaving behind exhaustion, pain, and the lingering traces of sedative. He looked dead on his feet, and Hannibal was certain that the emotions would hit him very soon.

"You and Abigail can wait in the car," he said softly. "You can lay down in the back seat with her and get some rest."

"How did you find us?" Will whispered, rubbing water and exhaustion from his eyes.

"I nearly didn't," Hannibal confessed. "I was looking in the wrong place. I'm so sorry it took so long."

"Wait," Will pressed a hand to his chest, looking up at Hannibal, trying to keep him in focus. "Who was that?"

"Will, it doesn't matter--"

"Like hell it doesn't," Will hissed. "He kidnapped your family and pretended to be you, in *every* sense that word implies, Hannibal, I deserve to know."

"A patient," Hannibal said. "A very sick, very disturbed patient."

Will looked at him a moment more before ducking his head and nodding, leaning against Hannibal again to just nuzzle into his shoulder, to breathe him in; the smell of his *husband,* of *Hannibal,* who had come to find them, to rescue them…

"You didn't call the police," Will mumbled, still nosing against Hannibal's slick skin. "You came on your own. Why did you come on your own?"

“Will,” Hannibal cupped his chin gently. “Please. I will explain everything, answer every question, but right now I need you to get dressed again and take Abby to the car.”

“No,” Will sniffed, wincing at the pain in his nose. “No, police will ask questions. Too many questions. Where the fuck are we?”

“Virginia,” Hannibal said. “Will, it’s *freezing--”*

“How far are we from the nearest gas station?”

“Miles,” Hannibal’s tone turned a little sterner. “You can’t walk that far, not in your condition.”

“I’m going to have to,” Will snapped back, “unless you want the cops on your ass, asking how you found us first and why you didn’t put this psychopath’s name forward for being a danger to himself and others.”

They stared each other down, until an unspoken agreement passed between them and Hannibal leaned in and kissed Will’s forehead.

“I’ll drop you close,” he whispered against him, “close enough that you can make it, far enough that it seems possible you walked. And then I’ll get you, when the police call I will *come for you,* Will.”

“I know,” Will swallowed. “I know you will.”

There were still so many unanswered questions that Will could barely nail down. He let Hannibal help him into his clothes, still too worn out from his struggle to properly support himself, even though the drug should surely have been out of his system by now.

Abigail was waiting for him, half dressed in a pull-up with her shirt on backwards. “Daddy-Papa say get dressed, we go home,” she told Will, pulling her polar bear close. Will wanted to chuck the damn thing out the window, but that would only lead to tantrums and questions he didn’t want to answer. “You friend not invited.”

“He was just here to help us surprise Papa,” Will assured her, crouching down. “Abby, honey, we’re going to play a game.”

Abigail perked up. “Game?”

“We’re going to pretend we were lost in the woods, okay? We’re going to go for a walk, and tell everyone we went for a ride with our friend and got lost. But we’re not going to talk about Papa, alright? Everyone needs to think we’re super brave and got out of the woods all by ourselves.”

“No Daddy-Papa?”

“He’ll meet us at the end of the game,” Will told her. “Let’s get you properly dressed, baby.”

“But tha’s lying.”

“Just this once,” Hannibal told her, and Abigail grinned up at him, stretching out her hands for him to pick her up. Hannibal tucked his nose into her hair, held her close as she wriggled about and pressed herself against him.

“Wanna know secret?” Abigail whispered to him.

“Hmm?”

“Daddy promised me chok-lit,” she said, expression delighted. “An’ Daddy keeps hims promise.”

Hannibal felt a laugh escape him, soft and gentle, and hugged Abigail close again. At his feet, Will stayed crouched and looked up at the two of them, expression hazy and exhausted, but *here,* alive.

“He does, baby girl,” Hannibal murmured. “He keeps every single one.”

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

> *Hannibal held her tightly, nose pressed to her hair, one arm extended pleadingly towards Will. Will shoved himself against Hannibal, gripping his family so tightly that Abigail gave an offended shriek of protest.*
>
> *"It's handled, " Hannibal breathed in Will's ear.*

The idea of having a secret kept Abigail pacified through the mile long walk down a lonely highway. Will had to carry her for most of it, and passed the time by coaxing her to think up a story about their time in the woods. She was so little, if they were lucky she'd quickly begin to mix up her story with the truth.

If they weren't lucky, well, for once Will was grateful she hadn't yet mastered the transition from Daddy to Papa. Any tales about Daddy could easily be attributed to Will.

The teenage clerk at the gas station looked like she was going to piss herself when Will walked in, bruised and black-eyed and carrying a toddler with unbrushed hair. Will deposited Abigail purposefully before a rack of candy, and then turned to lean over the counter.

"Call the police," he said, his voice a soft whisper, too low for Abigail to hear. "We've been abducted."

The terrified teenager swallowed, glancing over Will's shoulder at the empty gas pumps.

"He's not here," Will said, putting more urgency in his voice, "but I don't know if he followed us. Please."

"Daddy!" Will looked down to see his little girl triumphantly holding up a candybar that Hannibal would *not* approve of.

"Just a minute sweetheart," Will said, "Daddy needs to make a call."

"She can," the teen swallowed again, her voice cracked a little. "She can have that if she wants?"

Will laughed, just a puff of breath. "Thank you. Please. Police?"

"Yeah, yeah course, shit, umm. D'you… d'you want a coffee or something?"

Will gave her a look, knowing he looked far less charming than he usually did, when both his eyes blinked in time with each other. "That'd be great."

Abigail managed to eat her candybar before the police and ambulance arrived, and was already buzzing with sugar. She giggled as the EMTs looked her over, under Will's watchful gaze, as he answered questions.

No, he'd never met the man before. No, he didn't know why he was targeted. No, he wasn't sure how long he'd been gone, what was the date?

Abigail didn't have a scratch on her, but Will needed seeing to. He answered questions here, too.

No, I don't think my ribs are broken. Yes, he hit me often. Yes, I was drugged, I'm not sure what with. Three doses, that I can remember. No, I don't need a rape kit done.

Once Will was bandaged up, he gathered Abigail to him and asked one of the officers to call his husband.

Abigail had been gifted an entire McDonald's happy meal by the time Hannibal arrived at the police station, looking even more ragged than he had back at the cabin, his hair a mess, face red as though he'd been crying. He didn't spare the red cardboard box a single glance, when normally he'd be grimacing at just the smell of the grease.

"Will," he breathed, as if they'd been parted for years and not hours. Will offered him a lopsided, broken smile.

"I'm okay," he said. "We're okay!"

"Daddy!" Abigail shrieked, upending her little container of fries in her haste to get to him. She began to ramble, telling an even more embellished tale of their journey to the gas station than she'd told Will, and climbed Hannibal like a tree.

Hannibal held her tightly, nose pressed to her hair, one arm extended pleadingly towards Will. Will shoved himself against Hannibal, gripping his family so tightly that Abigail gave an offended shriek of protest.

"It's handled, " Hannibal breathed in Will's ear.

Will said nothing, he just let himself finally rest, finally close his eyes and *breathe.*

The police found nothing at the cabin but blood and the signs of a struggle, just as Will had described. An APB went out for Marcus, his phone was tracked, his credit cards were monitored, but it seemed that he had vanished without a trace.

Abigail didn't ask about Daddy-Papa's strange friend again.

"What did you do?" Will asked one afternoon, when Abigail was dozing in her nursery and Hannibal had poured them both a glass of wine. "When we left, before you came back."

"Hmm?"

“They didn’t find Marcus in the cabin,” Will added, tone more firm. “He was there when *we* left.”

Hannibal was quiet for a moment, before bringing the glass of wine to his face, taking the nose of it. Will watched him, eyes narrowed. He was still healing from the ordeal; Marcus had fractured his cheekbone and eye socket, and the swelling was still fairly severe.

“You were going to let me kill him,” he continued, when Hannibal showed no sign of cooperating and giving an answer. “You held him still, didn’t stop me, why?”

Hannibal remained silent, just let his eyes slip to meet Will’s before blinking and looking away. He took a sip of his wine.

“How many people have you killed?” Will asked next, tone almost jovial. He took a very deliberate mouthful of wine when Hannibal flinched at the words. “Yeah, I thought so. What the *fuck* Hannibal?”

Hannibal didn’t have an answer. Perhaps, at one point, he might have. An excuse, a pacification.

There was a time, Hannibal knew, when he would have simply made Will disappear, played the part of a grieving widow, made arrangements for Abigail at boarding schools or even with a new family entirely. He had the perfect excuse, with Marcus still believed to be on the run.

That time was long gone, left in the shadows of Hannibal’s past, along with the opera and quiet nights alone. There was no returning to that life for him, he knew that now. If Will gave him trouble, if Will kicked up enough a fuss that Hannibal was forced to stop him…

Well, there was always the basement. Hannibal was not sure what sort of life he would live with Will’s blood on his hands.

“I am what I am,” he said slowly. “And what I am is the same man you married.”

Will scoffed. “A man with secrets,” he growled.

“Don’t we all have our secrets?”

“How many, Hannibal?”

“I don’t know,” Hannibal replied quietly, finally looking at Will. Will’s jaw worked and Hannibal swallowed. He couldn’t lie to him. No, worse than that, he didn’t want to. “Five,” he admitted, barely voiced, “since we have been married.”

Will’s brows went up and then he sat back, setting his hands to the table to push himself up. He didn’t leave the room, he just pressed his hand to his mouth and turned in slow pensive circles where he stood. At his feet, Winston yawned and toppled to his side, expecting belly rubs that never came, and Fluff -- the puppy, aptly named by Abigail -- bounced on her back feet demanding to be picked up.

“Five people,” Will confirmed. “Five *people* since we’ve been married. Jesus Christ, Hannibal.”

He paced a few moments more, before dragging his chair out and turning it, straddling it and leaning over the back as he glared at his husband.

“I never asked you to be a father,” he reminded him. “I never asked you to take this on, but you did. You suggested the adoption, you signed the paperwork, you have a *daughter, Hannibal.”*

“I know.”

“Do you understand what will happen if you go to prison?” Will asked next. “How will I explain to her that her Papa hurt people?”

“I won’t go to prison, Will,” Hannibal assured him, though Will just scoffed. “Not unless you decide to turn me in.”

“Every day I wake up and slot together another piece of the puzzle that’s going to put someone behind bars,” Will said. “Every day, thousands of other people wake up and do the same. You think, out of all of us, not one is ever going to follow the breadcrumbs to *you* .”

“You didn’t,” Hannibal said quietly, watching with unexpected distress as Will bristled. “And I have far less faith in the rest of the lot than I do in you. If anyone was going to catch me, it was going to be you.”

“And now you want me to what, cover for you?”

“I had no intentions of you ever finding out,” Hannibal said softly. “Nor do I intend to have you risk your job on my behalf. I merely ask that you do not *aid* in my arrest.”

“And I ask that you don’t do shit that’s going to get you arrested in the first place,” Will spat. “The hell do you think we’re going to do without-”

And then he stopped, as a few more thoughts solidified. Will got up from the chair again and went to the liquor cabinet, selecting Hannibal’s oldest whiskey from its confines. He took a long pull straight from the bottle and then turned to level Hannibal with a glare. “The *Chesapeake Ripper,* Hannibal? Are you *fucking kidding me?”*

Hannibal swallowed. “Would it soften the blow to know that I never fed anything to Abigail?”

“No!”

“It is the truth regardless,” Hannibal replied. Will cursed and took another swig from the bottle, eyes on Hannibal the entire time, knowing how much it annoyed him when his precious things were used so casually.

“You fed me people,” Will stated after a moment.

“Yes.”

“And when you went back to the scene, you took Marcus to--”

“Yes.”

“Hannibal is he in the fucking fridge?” Will stormed back over. “He better not be in the fucking fridge, I swear to God.”

“In the freezer,” Hannibal corrected. “Downstairs.”

Will laughed, bringing both hands up to tug his hair as he mumbled curses that flowed from English into Cajun French. Pacing again, back and forth, round and round, before the whiskey finally did its job and made Will feel a little lightheaded. He sat at the table again.

“Get rid of him,” Will said, holding up a hand before Hannibal could interrupt. “And *not* by baking him into a fucking pie. I don’t want that thing near me or Abigail, do you understand me?”

Hannibal blinked up at him, for a moment thrown for a loop. Then he ducked his head, eyes still up and on Will’s. “Yes, Will.”

“And *don’t* feed me people. Ever. Again. If that shit touches my plate you are out of this house, Hannibal, and will be divorced before you even get into your goddamn Bentley.”

Hannibal’s cheeks warmed, he couldn’t help it, seeing Will this way, hearing him *compromise* rather than call the police, the FBI, everyone, was just… love. This is what love felt like, Hannibal realized.

“Of course,” he murmured. Will sat again, rubbing a hand over his face as his other rested over the back of the chair, wedding band catching the light. They were quiet for a time, then Hannibal reached out, taking Will’s hand and kissing his knuckles.

“Stop it.”

“I love you.”

“I said stop it,” Will muttered, but a smile was coming through despite his best efforts. “I’m still angry at you. I’m fucking livid, Hannibal.”

“I know.”

“I should make you sleep on the couch.”

“Surely the guest bedroom would be far enough away.”

“The couch,” Will insisted, “for the next *decade* .”

Hannibal kissed each and every one of Will’s fingertips, and Will didn’t know if he wanted to kiss him or *hit* him. He settled for pulling his hand away and trying to force a glare onto his

features.

“No,” he said sternly. “I am going to check on our child. *You* are going to hide a body. *Thoroughly* . Because I swear to god, Hannibal, if they find it, I’ll tell everyone you’ve been holding me hostage all this time.”

Hannibal smiled at him, small and soft and so *genuine* that it hurt to look at. Will huffed, running a hand through his hair.

“Hurry home,” he said softly.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

> *“Still mad at you,” Will murmured, with no heat or honesty to it. “This should count against your total for next year.”*
>
> *“Pity. I was going to make marsala.”*

Chapter Notes

> THANK YOU GUYS SO SO MUCH FOR SUPPORTING THIS WORK AND ALL OUR WORK!

Abigail started daycare a year and a month after Will and Hannibal adopted her, and she loved it.

They sent her thrice a week to start, just enough to get her to make friends, to socialize, to be a normal toddler. They’d looked for a long time for a place that could work with her trauma, that didn’t punish her for tantrums she couldn’t control. Hannibal and Will were always on call, but had never once had to come in yet to diffuse a situation.

It felt oddly freeing, being so normal.

No one ever found Marcus. Whatever Hannibal had done to him erased him from the world forever, and good riddance. Will never asked, and Hannibal never told him. Abigail forgot about Daddy-Papa’s weird friend in a blink.

Once in a while, a new Ripper victim would appear, and the FBI would swarm the scene with excited agitation. It was after a day like that, that Will came home in a mood.

Hannibal had dropped many of his clients, claiming his own trauma, and was home more often than he wasn’t, and Will found him in the kitchen, methodically chopping vegetables for a soup.

“Why do you do this to me, huh?” Will asked, sidling up behind him, wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s middle and pressing his cheek to his shoulder. “Can’t even go to work without you fucking *flirting* with me. Do you have any idea how *distracting* you are?”

One of Will's hands found Hannibal's tie and he brought it back over Hannibal's shoulder, wrapping it around his palm, over and over, until Hannibal's breath hissed between his teeth.

"What am I going to do with you?"

"I have a few suggestions," Hannibal whispered.

"Oh no you don't," Will growled, giving the tie another tug. "Your name was all over that crime scene, and I'm the only one who has a clue. I've been thinking about you for *hours* . I intend to take my *time* , not give you everything you want in one go."

When he turned Hannibal to face him, he looked entirely too pleased with himself. "The soup," he said, a flimsy excuse that neither of them cared about.

"Can wait."

"The child--"

"--is napping." Will bared his teeth in a wicked grin. "You're entirely at my mercy, Dr. Lecter."

"I was unaware you had any."

The kiss was sharp, biting. Will drew blood when he tugged at Hannibal's lower lip, and Hannibal nearly crushed him backing him up against the wall. Will tasted copper and merlot, Hannibal flooding all his senses.

Abigail had started to sleep better, they'd moved her bed out of their room two months earlier and less and less woke up to her climbing over the two of them in the middle of the night. Now, Will dragged his husband by the tie to the stairs, where he shoved him against another wall and rutted up against him.

"I've missed you," Hannibal murmured, cupping Will's face as Will grinned, feral and hungry.

"Yeah?" He breathed. "Good."

They took the stairs slowly, unable to keep their hands off each other, hushing the laughter and soft sounds that escaped them as they tiptoed past the nursery and shut themselves in the bedroom.

"I want you naked," Will groaned, releasing Hannibal's tie to tug his hair instead. "Right now."

"You need to let me go for that."

"Fine, start with me then."

Hannibal never *fumbled,* but his fingers did skip a few buttons, returning to them, trembling, as Will sucked kisses against his throat, down to where his neck met his shoulder. He

managed to get Will half bare before Will sank to his knees and worked Hannibal's pants open, nuzzling obscenely at the bulge between his legs as he dropped one hand to stroke himself too.

"God, you're a menace," Will said. "I'm married to a goddamn criminal."

He didn't give Hannibal time to say anything, he took his cock between his lips and sucked, moaning against him, tongue rough and quick, teasing just where he knew Hannibal liked it.

Hannibal's fingers twisted in wild curls, a little overgrown, long enough to frustrate Will and intoxicate Hannibal. He tugged, rewarded with a subtle press of teeth against sensitive flesh, not a bite, but a warning: Hannibal was not the one in control here.

Had he ever been, really? The moment he had met Will, his fate had been sealed. Will had known what he wanted, and gone for it, and Hannibal had merely been along for the ride.

Will sucked him until his knees were weak, until release was just within grasp, and then pulled back. He licked his lips, snapping the thin trail of saliva that connected them, looking up with pupils blown wide.

"Off," Will growled, starting with Hannibal's socks. Hannibal nearly ripped his shirt in his haste to get out of it, and soon they were tumbling together into the bed, Will astride Hannibal, biting bruises into his skin.

"Never get enough of you," Will complained, hands tracing each scar, fingers seeking the places that made Hannibal shiver.

"We must rectify that," Hannibal replied, his own hands coming up to squeeze over Will's thighs, his ass, slide up his back and into his hair again to drag Will back into a kiss.

It had taken several weeks from Will finding out about Hannibal's hobbies to him letting Hannibal into himself again, and that first consummation had been brutal. Something had awoken in Will, something feral and dangerous, and while he'd always given as good as he got, in everything, he'd never quite been so forward with his desires before.

Now, more often than not, it was Hannibal clinging to the headboard, stifling his groans against his arm.

He wouldn't have it any other way.

Will pulled back enough to rest their foreheads together and hummed, eyes at half mast, hands cupping Hannibal's face.

"I missed you too," he told him finally, as though Hannibal didn't know, as though every action wasn't screaming Will's devotion to him. "But what did we decide about your sprees, hmm?"

"Once a year, every year, until I've been good enough for two," Hannibal smiled, and Will grinned back.

“You’re showing off,” Will said. “Testing my skills and my *nerves* . As if I don’t know every inch of you by now.”

“Perhaps I merely wanted your attention.”

“Perhaps you should learn how to ask nicely.” Even as he said it, Will reached for the bedside drawer. There was no holding back. It had not taken long for him to see the beauty in Hannibal’s artwork. He’d seen it even before he’d known who to blame. Now, it stirred something within him, some confused pride that he could never entirely wash away. And the target Hannibal had picked…

“I had forgotten all about that salesman,” Will murmured, kissing his way down Hannibal’s chest. “How did you even find him?”

“He was very insistent with his business card,” Hannibal deflected, breath coming in quicker pants. “Will.”

“What? Am I distracting you?” Will pressed a kiss to the hollow of his hip, nipping sharp over the skin there.

“Yes,” Hannibal groaned, a laugh pouring forth warm as he spread his legs to accommodate Will between them. He dropped a hand into his hair and gripped the curls just a little too tight.

“Good.”

Hannibal had always prided himself on being… unreadable, on being mysterious and difficult to decipher. He’d started to open up with Will, when this had still been a short-term plan in his mind, but never like this. Now, he allowed Will to see every dark, shadowed part of himself; he gave his pleasure as freely as Will did. So when Will’s lips pressed agonizingly chaste kisses to his thighs, he moaned.

Foreplay could last for hours with them. There were days both were wired, flushed, trembling with need because Abigail had interrupted their explorations by waking from a nap, or calling from her room. But today, Will was determined to exhaust Hannibal and himself before she even knew he’d come home.

Lips and tongue, then lubricant and fingers, two to start, and Hannibal was panting into the room, gripping the sheets by his head with white knuckles and Will’s hair even harder. Will kissed reverently over Hannibal’s stomach, a low laugh escaping him as he found Hannibal’s prostate and deliberately teased around it, never quite giving enough for that spark to ignite.

“Will.”

“Hmm?”

“Will!”

“You wanted to play naughty,” Will told him, licking delicately where thigh met groin, avoiding the places Hannibal wanted him most. “This is what happens when you’re naughty.”

Hannibal groaned, folding a leg over Will's shoulder, using that and his grip on Will's hair to draw him in closer. His cock bumped against Will's nose, and Will snickered.

"I am not above taking things into my own hands," Hannibal warned.

"Yeah, I noticed." And Hannibal was beautiful when he did so, violent and rough and leaving bruises across WIll's skin. But tonight, Will wanted to take him to pieces. He gave a particularly rough thrust of his fingers, punching a gasp from Hannibal, and surged up to kiss him again.

They were beyond protection, beyond a need to avoid cleanup. Whenever the opportunity arose, they chose to be as close to each other as they could be, skin to skin, only the limits of their own bodies keeping them apart. Will pushed inside with a low groan, biting red marks into Hannibal's collarbone to muffle himself.

"Move," Hannibal demanded.

"Not yet," Will murmured. "I'm taking my time with you."

Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will, holding on almost too tightly, letting his hands drag down Will's sides and over his back when he arched up, leaving marks behind. Will hissed and shifted, just enough for Hannibal to feel, just enough to pull a sound from him, before pressing their foreheads together.

"God you feel so good," Will whispered, smiling as Hannibal preened.

And then he started to move.

There were days when they took their time, when a Sunday morning fuck was slow and lazy, half-awake and sloppy.

This was a claiming, a rough need to possess and be possessed. Will fucked into Hannibal and Hannibal let him, one hand dropping back to shove against the headboard, the other down to stroke his own cock as Will raced them both to the finish. They kissed, when they could catch the other's lips, they breathed when they couldn't, panted breaths pushed from them with every rough slap of skin.

It felt good. It felt right.

Hannibal came first, hard enough to spill up his chest and underneath his chin, and Will ducked his head to lick him clean as his body shivered and tensed, and he filled Hannibal up with deliberate deep thrusts.

The afterglow was more of a collapse, the two of them in a heap, trading lazy, sloppy kisses and murmurs of praise.

"Still mad at you," Will murmured, with no heat or honesty to it. "This should count against your total for next year."

"Pity. I was going to make marsala."

Will *adored* Hannibal's marsala, regardless of the main ingredient, and Hannibal knew it. Will shot him a halfhearted glare. "That's cheating," he said.

"I play only the hand I am dealt."

"Manipulative bastard," Will said, nuzzling their noses together. He was just considering a round two when, from down the hall, a little voice called out.

"Daddy? Papa?"

Hannibal sighed fondly. "Duty calls."

End Notes

Questions? Comments? Love? Ping us over on TWITTER, TUMBLR, or CURIOUSCAT!

"In every dispute between parent and child, both cannot be right, but they may be, and usually are, both wrong. It is this situation which gives family life its peculiar hysterical charm." - Isaac Rosenfeld.

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